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ENTERTAINING ANGELS UNAWARES:

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF ANGELIC IMAGERY IN MILLENNIUM ERA CULTURE

by

Kathryn Anne Cook Pallister ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Sociology

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ABSTRACT

From the vantage point of the millennium era, this dissertation examines the ways cultural texts construct images of angels. Approaching the subject from a constructionist theoretical base, the study involves semiotic examination of cultural texts and incorporates concepts from other theoretical traditions such as the sociology of religion and postmodernism. After an initial review of angelic imagery in historical culture and literature, the empirical research program focuses on representative examples from three types of cultural texts: television and film, material culture, and Internet websites. Of central importance to this study, issues of religion and secularization emerge in the empirical research, demonstrating that angels serve as a particularly contemporary form of spirituality that bridges traditional religion with more secular modes of personal spiritual expression. Similarly, angels operate as a symbol of apocalyptic thinking in the face of cultural challenges in the millennium era. In another vein of contemporary culture, angelic imagery illustrates gendered constructions of characters, with female angels characterized as beautiful helpers, while male angels act as virile consumers of physical pleasures. Although the research focuses primarily on texts, the role of the millennium era consuming subject creates an interesting possibility, as angel images serve as mirrors of sorts for their human consumers who can thus insert themselves into the idealized role of an angel. Finally, the political economy of culture emphasizes the commercial nature of cultural texts, driven by the forces of commodification to include certain images and representations and exclude others. Thus, while cultural trends and contexts certainly impact the construction of angelic characters, the underlying profit

motive shapes the texts at a fundamental level. While the touch of angels in contemporary cultural products may certainly fade with time, this dissertation demonstrates how traditional signifier/signified relationships with angelic imagery have given way to more contemporary interpretations. In the face of secularization in the millennium era, at least, consumers seek out personal forms of spirituality, including the "entertaining angels" in this study.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCING ANGELS

Introduction

With the recent dawning of the new millennium, North American culture has felt the touch of angels. Cultural products such as the television program *Touched by an Angel*, films such as *City of Angels* and *Michael*, a plethora of websites devoted to angels encounters, and collectibles ranging from dishtowels to greeting cards that depict angel imagery evidence that angels are indeed among us, in one form or another. With most Americans professing belief in angels in recent years (69% according to a 1993 *TIME* Magazine poll), angelic devotion seems to resonate strongly in our society, accounting in part for the images of angels that float around our collective consciousness (Russell, 1998). As Rabbi Morris B. Margolies (1994) wrote, "Angels are metaphors for the most basic human drives and emotions: love, hate, envy, lust, charity, malice, greed, generosity, sadism, delusion, vision, despair, fear, and hope" (p. 4).

Through media portrayal and people's stories of angelic encounters, angels clearly have a strong presence both materially and metaphorically in contemporary culture. Sociological research, however, has not devoted much attention to the subject of people's belief in angels. While academic examination of the subject of angels has occurred in fields such as theology and art history, few scholars have attempted to understand why so many people express belief in these "celestial creatures" and the meaning of this belief in contemporary culture. This dissertation seeks to close this gap by illuminating how belief in angels has become a part of Western culture throughout history, culminating in this millennium era.

In this dissertation, I aspire to answer the question "how and why has belief in angels become such an important part of the contemporary cultural landscape?" I answer this question in two closely related ways. First, I conducted an in-depth examination of literature on the subject of angels, including academic, popular, and cultural texts. Second, I conducted empirical investigation of angel imagery in cultural products, including research on the producers and consumers of these products. Through this project, I hope to contribute to the fields of the sociology of religion and the study of popular culture. Both of these fields, at present, appear to lack any detailed assessment of the inter-religious, cross-cultural, sacred/profane phenomenon of angelic belief. As well, through my socio-historical analysis, I hope to illuminate why belief in angels has ebbed and flowed in different times, places, and cultures, and what this ebb and flow reflects in contemporary culture. In essence, I argue that angels are constructed in contemporary culture through continually changing relationships between signifiers (images) and signifieds (the meaning of these images), chiefly concerned with the creation of a bridge between God and humanity. The millennium-era consuming subject who faces increasingly secularized forms of religion defines this relationship between signifier and signified. In the process of consumption, the subject grapples with institutionally prescribed signifier/signified relationships, as well as those relationships that most appropriately locate the subject in today's socio-historical context of secularization and personal spirituality.

Theoretical and Methodological Approaches of Dissertation

I approach this dissertation from the vantagepoint of Berger and Luckmann's (1966) theory of the social construction of reality. While speculation about whether angels actually exist may interest some scholars, for this study I focus more exclusively on the nature of people's belief in angels. In this light, the question "Do angels exist?", either tangibly or intangibly, lies beyond the scope of this study. Rather, this study focuses more meaningfully on the notion that North American millennium-era society, like other cultures and times, has constructed angels as "real" through our cultural products and artifacts and through our sharing of purported encounters with angelic beings. These constructions share both similarities with and differences from other historical constructions of angelic imagery.

Beyond this "social construction of reality" theoretical approach, and since clear academic literature and theoretical discussions exclusively about angels are limited, my dissertation must necessarily incorporate several strands of interdisciplinary theories, including the sociology of religion, postmodernism, theories of consumption, cultural studies theories, and psychoanalytic social theory. In keeping with this "constructivist" theoretical foundation, the general methodology I used to examine the subject of angels is social semiotics, which represents an appropriate, if potentially challenging, link among the various texts and theories used in this dissertation. Thus, I investigated the meaning infused in the production and consumption of media texts, collectibles, and websites featuring angels.

Through reflection on the historical treatment of angels, this dissertation examines the nature of the angel phenomenon in contemporary Western cultural products as it has developed out of a largely Judeo-Christian tradition, with occasional cross-cultural comparisons as appropriate. This examination incorporated five key research components:

> First, I surveyed both academic and popular literature about angels, as well as historical and cultural literature and artifacts, ranging from Biblical scriptures to Renaissance paintings. This survey laid the foundation for subsequent empirical research, and it also helped detail similarities and differences of the imagery and construction of angels across cultures and times.
>
> Second, I analyzed a sample of texts of a television program and three films that depict angels and angelic encounters. These textual analyses focused on the nature of the portrayals of angels and angel-related themes, examining these media texts discursively and contextually.
>
> Third, I researched at a retail outlet that specializes in angel-related products. This research included interviews with storeowners as well as observations of products and, to a lesser extent, customers within the store.
>
> Fourth, I examined websites devoted to angels and angelic encounters. This research took the form of semiotic textual analysis of the sites, including texts and images created by the producers and those submitted by visitors to the sites.

Fifth, I collectively examined these research components to delineate similarities and differences in the socio-cultural phenomenon of angels. I then compared these similarities and differences to traditional and contemporary religious and spirituality beliefs as well as academic theories on religiosity to examine continuities and incommensurabilities.

These methods show a preference for qualitative methods, rather than quantitative ones. As Hewitt (1993) suggested, sociologists who study religion often use qualitative methods such as participant observation and interviews in order to understand the ways people encounter religion in their everyday lives. This approach also reflects the theoretical approach of the construction of angels as a social reality. Other qualitative methods can include examination of historical and archival documents and would broadly include cultural artifacts as a means to understand how historical cultures have experienced religion and how contemporary cultures and continue to do so.[1] As this section indicates, I used interviews, observations, and examination of historical texts and artifacts. Considering the aims of this study, I focused mainly on analyzing qualitatively how and why belief in spiritual phenomenon such as angels figures so prominently in people's lives and how this belief reflects the tension between the spiritual and the secular in millennium-era culture.

Structure of Dissertation

Following this introductory chapter, which next includes a discussion of why I chose the topic of angels as a lens through which to examine millennium era culture, Chapter Two, "Investigating Angels," details the theory and methods upon which the empirical research of this dissertation rest, as outlined in the previous section. Next, Chapter Three, a review of literature relating to angels, further contextualizes this study. This literature review includes academic work on angels and popular works on the subject as well. For an historical perspective on angels, I examined religious texts, beginning with the Old Testament. As well, I incorporated artistic imagery of angels, of particular importance during the eras from which few written texts exist.

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[1] Of course, quantitative methodology also has a place in the sociology of religion. Scholars such as Bibby (1993) have executed large-scale examinations of religious attitudes/beliefs and church membership, respectively. To support my research aims, however, qualitative methods will provide the most appropriate data.

The next three chapters detail the empirical research I conducted, each with extensive discussion of the meaning making that occurs with each type of cultural product. Chapter Four, "Entertaining Angels," discusses several case studies that feature angels. Chapter Five, "Materializing Angels," assesses the popularity of angel collectibles by investigating two retail establishments that sell angel-themed products. Then, Chapter Six, "(Re)Creating Angels," presents a contemporary view of angels by examining angel-themed websites and the role of websites creators and consumers.

Chapter Seven attempts to synthesize the empirical research by delineating consistencies and incommensurabilities in these results. It draws conclusions about the construction and reconstruction of angelic imagery in millennium era culture, with consideration to socio-cultural issues of the era.

So...What is it About Angels?

The preceding paragraphs attempt to delineate how this dissertation will approach the study of angels. Yet the question "What is it about angels?," as I have often been asked, needs answering in order to more fully legitimate this extensive project, both in terms of writing it, as well as reading it (though perhaps to a lesser extent). The answers to this question also introduce some of the research findings I will discuss in subsequent sections of this dissertation.

To begin, I chose to research angels because I have observed their presence in many different instances in our culture. In recent years, television programs, movies, popular songs, and print media have treated the subject matter of angels a great deal in recent years. As well, angel imagery adorns virtually every type of collectible, from greeting cards to figurines to t-shirts. Indeed, from the inception of this project, I have personally witnessed countless examples of this phenomenon, and people aware of the project continually brought additional examples to my attention. These observations indicate to me that angels have become an important, if faddish, element of the contemporary cultural landscape, with followers or fans as with other trends. The popularity of angel films and television programs in the late 1990s and the introduction of angel retail outlets in the same period, point to the millennium as a time of particular popularity for angel cultural products. My research, particularly in the retail industry, indicated that the angel trend might be waning, though it remains sufficiently fashionable right now.

My desire to do this research at this point in my scholarly career is also highly motivated by timing. The millennium era we experience now, as well the millennial thinking that has surfaced and continues to surface, has a unique positioning in recorded social history, enhanced by the communications technology that allows for widespread attention to the dawning of the third millennium. This unique time, coupled with the significant role angels play in the apocalypse in Judeo-Christian scriptures, means the time to research angels is now. I discovered in my research, however, that apocalyptic imagery did not always have a place in the contemporary "angel culture" that I studied, as it presented a more negative message than producers or consumers wanted to endorse. The possibility of the downward movement of the angel trend, in contrast, illustrates that the rise in angel imagery may in fact have coincided with the height of millennium-inspired apocalyptic thinking.

In terms of the popularity of angels, the role society has constructed for angels, perceived as a tangible and sometimes human expression of the supernatural, represents a form of spirituality that people with a variety of religious and spiritual beliefs seem to understand and appreciate. This positioning of angels makes for an ideal sociological entry into the field of religion and theology. Likewise, angels have become part of both spiritual and everyday life, as people experience angels in the pews of their churches as they listen to sermons and then go home to their wallhangings of Michelangelo's angels, wearing their guardian angel pins on their lapels. As my research illustrated, contemporary cultural products construct angels as a means to focus consumers on the everyday, in part through these everyday brushes with angels in cultural products from films to collectibles. In her book *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America,* Colleen McDannell (1995) discussed the importance of religious material culture in American society. In a review of McDannell's book, in support of this notion of the importance of material culture, Nancy Ammerman (1995) wrote that "McDannell helps us to see even more clearly...that religion must be understood as part of the everyday lives of ordinary people who engage in the construction of meaning and surround themselves with the things that remind them of their connection to God" (p. 289). In fact, my research showed that culture producers infuse angelic imagery with both traditional and contemporary signifiers, opening the possibility for a range of readings from highly religious to completely secular. This finding fits well with the trend of secularization and alternative spirituality in North America.

Beyond the trend of secularization, and perhaps in support of the rise in alternative religion, angels have a place in many of the different forms of religion that create the spiritual landscape of North American culture, including hybrid forms of religion that combine fragments of many different religious traditions. While this dissertation focuses on mainstream Judeo-Christian roots of North American culture, where angels have a clearly prescribed role in spiritual belief, it also makes comparisons with belief in angels prevalent in the faiths loosely categorized as "New Age" or "alternative." These comparisons contribute to the range of readings demonstrated in the cultural products I studied. In my research, occasional attention to the belief in angels in other religious traditions, including less traditional denominations of the Judeo-Christian faiths, helped me compare different beliefs about angels to more fully delineate the subject. Furthermore, the presence of angels in the dominant religious discourse provides a focal point for people to pin their own incorporations of angels. And, while much belief in angels certainly bases itself on dominant interpretations, my research illustrated that negotiated and resistant interpretations also exist. Belief in angels may not serve as the center of people's religious beliefs; it would more typically seem to augment other beliefs. While a certain segment of the population may embrace closely belief in angels, a much wider portion of people would include belief in angels under the umbrella of their larger religious belief system. The fact that belief in angels crosses over religions adds to the potential for the popularity of angels.

I believe angels, as a result of their popularity hold particular significance for gender issues in contemporary religion. For example, although most Judeo-Christian angels are portrayed as more male, many contemporary images are female. This difference in portrayal raises any number of questions as to the appropriateness of the images, the choice of women as angels to "attract" people to popular cultural products, the "servant" roles these female angels perform, and even the nature of activity of women within the church. Certainly audience expectations also shape the choice in feminine signifiers, as many consumers are female, particularly for the material culture and television products. In addition, McDannell's (1995) previously mentioned work imported feminism into the discussion of religious material culture, through the assertion that people often perceive material culture ("kitsch") and everyday practices as female, while pure art and official religion fall more in the male domain. My research on angel material culture particularly illustrated that this contention holds across the collectibles industry, as did my observations on the "elite" films featuring male angels and the more "popular" television medium featuring female angels. Furthermore, the male images in the films I studied seemed sexualized and/or feminized, while the female angels in the television program appeared as sexually neutral "helpers." While much "angel culture" seems to turn away from large social issues, the issue of gender certainly plays a part across the cultural products I observed.

Finally, at perhaps the basest level, I see angels as a significant topic because of their consumptive value. Angels may serve as an element of traditional religion that people distill and selectively consume. In a more secular sense, the consumption of angel imagery and artifacts makes for a very commercially viable situation, whether brief or long-lived. In a similar vein, as Harrison (1991) discussed, advertisers have tapped into religious ideas and imagery in order to sell their products, in response to the notion that "Spirituality is in." This spirituality differs, however, from more traditional expressions, as Harrison (1991) noted. Instead, "the current [spirituality] reflects an increasing separation of spiritual values from the constraints of dogma and denomination" (Harrison, 1991, p. 22). As my research showed, producers of everything from films to collectibles thus offer cultural products with the sorts of messages these consumers want to consume, regardless of commensurabilities with traditional religion and artistic vision. In terms of angel culture, this range of signifiers means that the signifiers are typically generic enough for consumers with a wide spectrum of religious beliefs and positive enough for consumers to want to consume these images. This juxtapositioning of the spiritual and the secular spurred on my motivation to focus my dissertation on the subject of angels and people's belief in them.

As this and subsequent sections of this project illustrate, I hope to contribute to the fields of sociology of religion and secularization as well as the general area of cultural studies through this dissertation research. The next chapter of this dissertation details the theoretical and methodological approaches I use for this study. While I do not attempt to answer the age-old query "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?", the concepts I discuss could potentially illustrate some of the ways one could approach the question, were one inclined to do so in a sociological manner.

CHAPTER 2: INVESTIGATING ANGELS: THEORY & METHODS

Introduction

In order to lay the foundation for my empirical research on angels in millennium-era culture appropriately, this chapter discusses the theories and methods out of which the study grew. First, I discuss the theories of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, in terms of the social construction of reality (SCR). This is the fundamental theoretical underpinning of the study, as I approach the topic of angels not to determine their reality in some scientific way, but to focus more on how and why angels become constructed as real through social interactions and cultural products. After this initial theoretical discussion, I go on to explore theories that focus more specifically on religion and secularization. Next, I touch on some theories of structuralism and postmodernism that further illustrate this notion of angels as socially constructed entities that people consume in millennium era, North American society.

Following this theoretical discussion, I explain the methods through which I investigated angelic imagery in cultural products. My choice of a methodology, social semiotics, emerges naturally from the SCR perspective as this methodology rests on symbolic imagery and the socially created meaning-making involved in the production and consumption of these images. In my discussion of methods, I provide a brief overview of the history and development of key terms of semiotics. I go on to provide some critiques of semiotics, to aid in creating a balanced research program. Finally, I briefly present the specific techniques used in my empirical research.

Theory

The Social Construction of Reality: Berger & Luckmann

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's 1966 work *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* provided an important breakthrough in social theory. While Berger and Luckmann owe their heritage to the phenomenology of Schutz and the symbolic interactionism of Mead, in addition to the work of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, their work provided a new, interesting synthesis in the sociology of knowledge. They saw reality as "a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition"(p. 1) and knowledge as "the certainty that phenomena are real and that they possess specific characteristics" (p. 1).

Berger and Luckmann (1966) asserted that knowledge differs from individual to individual and society to society. Thus, reality, too, differs depending on social factors, such as Marx's class configurations. As they argued, "What is 'real' to a Tibetan monk may not be 'real' to an American businessman. The 'knowledge' of a criminal differs from the 'knowledge' of the criminologist" (p. 3). While this idea seems to me at the same time intriguing and commonsense, Berger and Luckmann (1966) argued that the sociology of knowledge, due to its European origin, had difficulty gaining a stronghold with American sociologists. In particular, they noted how the work of Scheler, Marx, Nietzsche, and Dilthey might have prevented full American acceptance. Through Mannheim's work, both accessible and translated into English, American sociologists began to embrace the area. Robert Merton, Talcott Parsons, and Werner Stark took up the project, further entrenching it in the American context (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Although Berger and Luckmann (1966) did not focus on methodological problems inherent in the sociology of knowledge, they acknowledged the overarching issue of objectivity in understanding a particular area of knowledge when one is a part of the social group who constructed that knowledge. They saw this dilemma as "somewhat like trying to push a bus in which one is riding," (p. 13) which led them to observe that "[t]he central question for sociological theory can then be put as follows. How is it possible that subjective meanings *become* objective facticities?" (p. 18).

Berger and Luckmann (1966) made clear that they prefer to focus on "knowledge that guides conduct in everyday life" (p. 198), rather than a theoretical, intellectual understanding of reality. They note that this everyday reality becomes taken for granted, and that this reality exists beyond an individual. Knowledge becomes, fundamentally, an intersubjective element; as Berger and Luckmann (1966) wrote, "commonsense knowledge is the knowledge [we] share with others in the normal, self-evident routines of everyday life" (p. 23). They also noted the importance of language in providing individuals with the tools to objectify things in their experiences. Indeed, they observed that reality-entrenched language makes it difficult to verbalize or translate non-everyday experiences, such as religion. They noted that "a special but crucially important case of objectivation is signification, that is, the human production of signs" (p. 35). Berger and Luckmann (1966) suggested that signs prove particularly valuable because they can communicate beyond a particular spatial and temporal location. Language enables objectivication, as it exists only external to individual subjects through their communication with other subjects. Relevant aspects of life become real to people, while aspects of life that are not encountered fail to become real.

Through intersubjective interactions, certain actions become predictable or institutionalized. For example, certain media genres become part of a culture, so consumers of a particular product will be able to predict, say, a happy ending. These institutionalizations become part of a society and continue to exist beyond any individuals. Berger and Luckmann (1966) wrote, "an institutional world, then, is experienced as an objective reality" (p. 60).

While Berger and Luckmann (1966) agreed that not all members of a society unquestioningly accept an institutionalized reality, they asserted that enough individuals do accept it to create and maintain its institutionalized status. Berger and Luckmann (1966) warned, however, that "as soon as an objective social world is established, the possibility of reification is never far away" (p. 89). The process of reification entails the repositioning of human activity to non-human (potentially supernatural) status. For example, the notion that dead loved ones become guardian angels for the living could be communicated, thus objectified, and then institutionalized and eventually reified. That this notion belies even scriptural (thus, supernatural) belief further supports this potential of reification.

In the inter-generational transmission of meaning, the process of legitimation of objective meaning ensures the explanation of justification of the meaning. The symbolic universe, in addition to providing an asynchronous way of organizing reality, also enables individuals to understand their own society and its realities. For example, the belief that angels peacefully escort the dying to heaven provides a sense of peace not only (apparently) for the dying, but for the living who now must live with the death of a loved one.

A society maintains the symbolic universe through "machineries" such as mythology and theology, as well as philosophy of science (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 110). Berger and Luckmann (1966) called mythology "a conception of reality that posits the ongoing penetration of the world of everyday experience by sacred forces (p. 110). Theology, then, resembles mythology, though theology involves more systematization, and, to Berger and Luckmann, theology remains more the purvey of elite specialists than everyday people.

The symbolic universe is not static, either, as it becomes re-embodied in the ever-changing group of people who inhabit a society. As Berger and Luckmann (1966) wrote, "highly abstract symbolizations (that is, theories greatly removed from the concrete experience of everyday life) are validated by social rather than empirical support" (p. 199). While a monopoly of the symbolic universe is possible (thus creating a dominant ideology), competing theories of reality can also exist, depending on the power of various social groups (this creating competing ideologies). Berger and Luckmann (1966) argued that many societies are pluralistic, with a set of shared core ideas and variance in more peripheral areas (p. 125). This pluralism especially characterizes industrial, developed, urban societies. Despite the multiplicity inherent in pluralism, according to Berger and Luckmann (1966), "what remains sociologically essential is the recognition that all symbolic universes and all legitimations are human products; their existence has its base in the lives of concrete individuals, and has no empirical status apart from these lives" (p. 128).

Berger and Luckmann (1966) posited that individuals are born into a pre-existing objective social structure, and in this social structure individuals become socialized through their interactions with others (p. 131). Thus, individual subjects begin to simultaneously understand the social world and their own subjective identity. This twofold understanding occurs first through primary socialization (with significant others) as well as secondary socialization, "the internalization of institutional or institution-based 'subworlds'" (p. 138). These institutions might include education and media. As Berger and Luckmann (1966) wrote, "Society, identity *and* reality are subjectively crystallized in the same process of internalization" (p. 133).

Individuals also seek to confirm their own realities through communication with others that share their same reality. To use Berger and Luckmann's example, a Catholic would seek to "refresh" her Catholic identity by socializing with other Catholics. Thus, individuals are able to maintain the plausibility of their reality through this re-socialization.

In their theories, Berger and Luckmann (1966) looked for ways to understand and examine everyday life in a social context, rather than some sort of objective, scientific truth. While Berger and Luckmann tended to focus on interpersonal situations of secondary and re-socialization, clearly their arguments hold for larger-scale, institutional socialization. The Catholic who seeks to reaffirm the plausibility of Catholicism can just as easily purchase a guardian angel figurine in a mass-market store as interact with other Catholics in order to maintain this plausibility.

To begin to narrow the focus from the theoretical approach of the social construction of reality to contemporary cultural belief in angels, I turn to Berger and Luckmann's individual works relating to the sociology of religion, specifically on religion and secularization in the post-industrial era. Clearly, the field of the "sociology of angels" is a narrow one, even though, as noted in the subsequent literature review, belief in angels has had a substantial role in Western society. Because of the lack of sociological attention given to belief in angels, no significant theories in this area have surfaced. Nonetheless, the broader field of the sociology of religion provides an appropriate theoretical vantagepoint from which to begin this examination.

At the outset, the sociology of religion seems almost a categorical impossibility, as at first glance it requires the scientific examination of belief in supernatural forces or experiences. A generally Weberian orientation, however, towards the sociological examination of religion seeks to understand the role of religion in society in a value-free way

In his works on the subject, Peter Berger used an approach loosely categorized as symbolic-interactionist to study religion and society, as he asserted that religion is socially constructed (though perhaps, as some would believe, with divine intervention) through rituals (e.g. Catholic mass at Christmas). Recognizing the lack of any cohesive theory to embrace for this study of angels, I have great affinity for Berger's theories because his arguments about secularization and spirituality relate to how and why angels have become such a notable part of today's religious and cultural landscape. Although scholars have produced considerable work in the field in the last thirty years, Berger's concise yet thorough analysis prompts me to prefer his work to other, more recent, work. As well, Berger's notion of the social construction of reality reflects my contention in this dissertation that it is less important to investigate whether or not angels are real, and more important that people have constructed a real presence for angels in society.

In his 1967 book *The Sacred Canopy*, Berger wrote that "religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established" (p. 25). Thus, religion serves as the sacred canopy that provides the overarching order by which we construct our social reality. Religion provides this canopy because, unlike other social institutions, it possesses a sense of meaning that includes, yet for believers goes beyond, human society.

Despite the over-arching role of religion in society, Berger's 1969 book *A Rumor of Angels* suggested that spirituality has waned as society has become increasingly secular. For example, in recent years, church attendance in Canada has dropped to about half as compared with attendance during the 1940s (Hewitt, 1993, p. 4). In a more theoretical support of this trend, Bibby (1993) suggested that Comte, Marx, and Freud, among others, saw religion as a condition more prevalent in premodern societies. In this line of argument, the condition of religion will erode as societies become increasingly rational and modern (and for Marx, communist).

Berger (1969) emphasized, however, that the secularization of society goes beyond the notion that religious institutions have less power in society. He asserted that the process of secularization has influenced people's consciousness (Berger, 1969, p. 4). He went on to criticize the lack of scholarly attention to issues of religion, noting that most sociologists ignore religion, deeming it an issue associated more with antiquity than modernity (Berger, 1969, p. 5). Although he did recognize that some sociologists do examine religion as a social institution (perhaps, as he suggested, as a way to justify their own fields if nothing else), he saw the nearly exclusive focus on religion in terms of church as ignoring the larger issues relating to a more broadly defined secularization (Berger, 1969, p. 5).

As the secular has superseded the spiritual, Berger (1969) saw an essential force at work in contemporary religion as the "translating" of the traditional, supernatural phenomenon into more tangible, terrestrial terms. Thus, people in contemporary society come to know religion in ways relevant and easily accessible to their everyday experiences. He wrote, "the basic intellectual task undertaken as a result of this option is one of *translation*. The traditional religious affirmations are translated into terms appropriate to the new frame of reference, the one that allegedly conforms to the *Weltanschauung* of modernity" (Berger, 1969, p. 25). For example, the supernatural notion of God might become translated into a belief in the presence of angels on earth who move about disguised as people. This belief in angels not only translates the supernatural into the everyday, but also appeals to a wide cross-section of religious and spiritual beliefs.

Berger (1969) maintained that this pluralism that characterizes modern society sets up a situation in which consistent belief in the supernatural becomes increasingly difficult. As people associate with an increasingly diverse population, they become acclimated to many types of worldviews, or *Weltanschauung*. As well, people themselves take on many different roles in modern society, giving them an increasingly complex worldview, and at times, worldviews. Thus, Berger (1969) asserted, the plausibility of one unified belief system, such as that of a religious organization, becomes increasingly problematic for modern people (p. 43).

Despite this trend towards the "demise of the supernatural," Berger (1969) did acknowledge that certain segments of society would continue a steadfast belief in the supernatural. As well, many people will likely maintain belief in some element of the supernatural (such as a general belief in God) while disbelieving in other elements of the supernatural (such as a specific belief in papal divine descendancy). Nock (1993) discussed this phenomenon in Canada of "religious nones," people who claim no religious affiliation," and "Sheilas,"[2] people who claim to be religious without adherence to a particular religion. Bibby (1993) also asserted that people prefer a postmodern-esque pastiche of religious practices or beliefs. This "selective consumption" allows people to maintain their need for some sort of spiritual framework, yet they can customize their spirituality to suit their needs, moods, or preferences. This style of consumption provides an opportunity for the influx of consumer-friendly religions and quasi-religions such as New Age groups.

The question for organized religion, then, becomes one of competition. Why would a "modern" person seek enlightenment through religious/spiritual means when there are other, secular options today that offer the same end? Berger (1969) asserted that most people would likely involve themselves with religions and religious organizations that somehow provide a middle ground between traditional religious thought and modern secular thought. As a result, the supernatural becomes increasingly diluted (or, polluted) by the secular, and through this dilution, loses its essential defining character.

To further understand the trend towards secularization and religious selective consumption, Berger (1969) built on the ideas of Feuerbach through an explanation of the relationship between humans and religion. For Feuerbach, religion served as projections of humans' own humanity, not an external, supernatural set of governing principles (Berger, 1969, p. 57). Based on the Hegelian dialectic, this notion also received attention in the theories of Freud and Marx on religion, (Berger, 1969, p. 57). This philosophical proposition sets up Berger's argument that a sociological examination of religion should have an anthropological origin, as "starting with man" provides the best vantage point for the study of theology. For example, Berger (1969) argued that human traits (such as a desire for order, a propensity for joy, an orientation towards the future, and a fear of the permanence of death) reflect the role religion has in our lives.

In a later work, *Facing up to Modernity: Excursions in Society, Politics, and Religion,* Berger (1977) referred to Bellah's notion of civil religion as "an amalgam of beliefs and norms that are deemed to be fundamental to the American political order" (p.

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[2] This term comes from Bellah et al's (1986) article, discussed in Nock (1993), that related the theories of a woman named Sheila Larson, whose brand of religion centers on herself and her own decisions about what

150), as opposed to the more specific denominational religions. This civil religion encompasses basic values (e.g. human rights) and religious tolerance that enables what Berger saw as a symbiotic relationship between civil and denominational religions.

Berger (1977) noted that in 1955, religion was flourishing among younger people, though there was also a process of "invisible secularization" taking place. This secularization resulted from the fact that church attendance at the time may have had more to do with issues such as a desire to reestablish community ties than actual religion motives (p. 155). This invisible secularization paved the way for the rise of civil religion. During the 1960s, however, this "religious revival" waned, and it has continued to do so. Berger suggested, though, that it remains "perfectly possible that future religious resurgences will create new institutional forms and that the existing institutions will be left behind as museum pieces of a bygone era" (p. 160).

Berger argued that the "deobjectivation" of religion has allowed people to experience religion as a socially constructed, subjective experience, rather than an empirically focused enterprise. Writing in 1977, Berger asserted that "many in our churches today can be described as being *in search of a culture with which to identify*"(p. 185). Thus, he believed that the secular society he wrote of in 1977 would seek to revive religion in some capacity.[3] He also posited that this renewed religious enthusiasm may also tap into the sexual liberation (of his time), resulting in a spirituality that celebrates the sexual.

Separate from Berger, Luckmann (1967) also investigated issues of religion, spirituality, and secularization, with a constructionist theoretical background. He began his book *The Invisible Religion* with the question "What is the impact of modern society upon the course of individual life?" (p. 9), a question he believed in the realm of the social sciences as a whole. He argued that modern society has created an entirely new relation between the individual and social institutions. According to Luckmann (1967), this issue has received special focus in the sociology of religion, starting with the work of

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to believe and disbelieve.

[3] Berger (1977) believed this resurgence will be Christian in nature, though he acknowledged that other possibilities, do, indeed, exist. He also argued that a return to religion is most likely amongst those populations who have become most secular: college educated, middle class people.

Durkheim and Weber. Luckmann (1967) contended that, while the sociology of religion enjoys prominence in journals, conferences, etc., the field lacks theoretical development in favor of more descriptive enterprises. Luckmann (1967) pointed to the conception of self borne out of Durkheim's homo duplex concept and Mead's theories of the self. Both see the individual as the product of society rather than society as the product of individuals. Thus, personal identity can only emerge through intersubjective relationships. Luckmann (1967) saw this theory as largely overlooked in the sociology of religion. Thus, the focus rests on the institutional nature of religion and churches, usually forgetting the individual.

In sum, Luckmann (1967) recognized that organized religion at the level of social institution has shifted from its traditional central role in society. Luckmann (1967) concluded that, in the aftermath of modernity, organized religion moved from the center to the periphery of peoples' lives in Europe, while religion underwent a process of internal secularization in the US. This "secularization," while of central importance to the timbre of society as a whole and religion as an element of society, does not necessarily mean that religion and spirituality have vanished. Rather, Luckmann (1967) recognized the potential for individuals to re-create their own forms of spirituality and religion in a private, rather than public, context. In terms of consumption, this means that people who watch religious programming in their living rooms and in the company of religious *tchotchkes* or knick-knacks may enjoy the freedom to construct their religiosity and spirituality in an individual and private way.

In his attempt to understand this social trend, Luckmann saw two questions of central importance to the examination of secularization: first, what caused it, and second, did anything replace religion? Luckmann (1967) refused to accept industrialization and science as two easy answers. Instead, he argued "the decrease in traditional church religion may be seen as a consequence of the shrinking relevance of the values, institutionalized in church religion, for the integration and legitimation of everyday life in modern societies" (p. 39). To further his understanding of the process of secularization, Luckmann (1967) sought to understand the function of religion at a macro level, in the Durkheimian sense. Ultimately, Luckmann saw religion as relating everyday life to a transcendent reality. This interpretive function can only happen at an individual level, however, if it occurs in a social context. Just as an individual transcends his or her biological nature in social relations, everyday life can be transcended for another level of reality. Luckmann (1967) observed this relation between self and society as fundamentally transcendent, and thus fundamentally religious. At the social level, an individual inherits the worldview of a particular time and place. Thus, the individual can experience meaning-making at a level that transcends individual possibilities (Luckmann, 1967). An individual can thus perceive him- or herself as part of a larger context or tradition. Socialization occurs as individuals internalize the worldview.

When the individual engages in ritual acts (e.g. sacraments), these acts have no practical function in everyday life; individuals perform ritual acts exclusively for a sacred or transcendental purpose (Luckmann, 1967). Furthermore, language enables the "reality" of the sacred by enabling individuals to give it meaning through discourse. Beyond the level of the individual, the institutionalization of religion involves differentiated social roles for people who regulate the knowledge and performance of the sacred, the presence of a surplus over subsistence, and the sharing of sacred knowledge. Laymen become increasingly removed from direct involvement with the sacred as religious experts take over (Luckmann, 1967).

As well, more complex societies are less likely to have complete congruence between official religion and a personal system of significance, as there are more options and factors. The church begins to take on secular functions (economic and political) and thus moves away from its traditional sacred purposes (Luckmann, 1967). This process of secularization happens at a rather slow pace, though, as the official model of religion changes at a rate slower than that at which society changes. Each succeeding generation will then see less and less congruence, as their religion becomes more social. Furthermore, religious roles are often circumscribed as part-time, while secular roles are held more continuously (Luckmann, 1967).

Despite his focus on churchly religion and the trend of secularization he identified, Luckmann (1967) insisted that "the norms of traditional religious institutions—as congealed in an 'official' or formerly 'official' model of religion—cannot serve as a yardstick for assessing religion in contemporary society" (p. 91). As social institutions become more anonymous, individuals see themselves as more anonymous in terms of their social roles. Thus, Luckmann (1967) wrote, "personal identity becomes essentially a private phenomenon. This is, perhaps, the most revolutionary trait in modern society" (p. 97). The individual can then make autonomous decisions about everything from marriage partners to religious practice. Luckmann (1967) noted that "once religion is defined as a 'private affair' the individual may choose from the assortment of 'ultimate' meanings as he sees fit" (p. 99). This assortment can range from traditional organized religion to a purely individual and personal construct.

In summary, Berger and Luckmann's collective and individual efforts to assess religious and secular state of affairs in contemporary Western society illustrated very effectively why belief in angels has taken on such an important role in contemporary society, and thus why their theories resonate strongly with this dissertation. As contemporary religions attempt to keep pace with developing cultural trends that people can easily comprehend, angels serve as an excellent vehicle or metaphor for this translation. Therefore, religions that can successfully "translate," or provide a middle ground between the secular and the spiritual, will succeed more in the competition for contemporary congregants. Thus, angels also respond to the fragmentary character of much of modern religious life, as people can distill favorable elements like angel belief out of religions that lack total acceptability (e.g. feminists seeking to eschew patriarchal elements from traditional religions). Furthermore, individuals in contemporary (post-modern) society relate differently to religion as a social institution than their modern predecessors did, making the consumption of any religious or spiritual construct a more privatized affair. As well, with the influx of non-Western religions, angels represent in many ways a cross-religion, a hybrid of many religions, from Catholicism to New Age. Finally, angels provide a connection between the "starting point of man" and humanity's desire for order, the future, and an escape from death, as angel imagery and function remain closely tied with the human realm. All of these elements, taken collectively, begin to illustrate why people have constructed belief in angels as an important part of their culture.

Beyond Berger and Luckmann: Sociology of Religion and the Postmodern Turn

Although Berger and Luckmann's works provide significant insight into the process of secularization that underpins the presence of angels in contemporary culture, their temporal context of the 1960s and 1970s needs updating in order to account for the issue of secularization in the millennium era context. This updating has particular relevance for the current project of examining the relationship between signifier and signified in the consumption of angelic-themed cultural products.

To indicate the relevance of Berger and Luckmann's works decades after their publication, David Lyon (1994) pointed to Berger's work as particularly important to the understanding of religion in modernity and postmodernity as Berger focused on how traditional religion has eroded and how modernity has facilitated this erosion through societal changes that have moved the church and the authority of faith to the periphery. Inspired by Berger's notion of the "heretical imperative," Lyon (1994) characterized religion in a postmodern sense as increasingly fragmented and increasingly consumer-oriented, pandering to the populace's desire to choose freely from an infinite pool of consumables ranging from shoes to spirituality. He also pointed out that religious movements characteristic of postmodernity (such as New Age spiritualism) focus on "the desire to discover the divine in ourselves through a great diversity of routes" (p. 62).

Alongside of the success of these "alternative religions" is the postmodern project of questioning, or perhaps "deconstructing," traditional religions through projects such as Scorcese's film *The Last Temptation of Christ* and Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (Lyon, 1994, p. 62). These seemingly heretical projects apparently have a dual role in postmodern society, as they simultaneously call into question traditional religion as well as serve as a communal rallying cry for renewing faith (Lyon, 1994, p. 62).

Finally, Lyon (1994) makes a connection between postmodernism and millennialism. The postmodern condition, to Lyon, involves a questioning of the "improvements" made through modernization, and thus often is accompanied by the sentiment that modernity is an end, rather than a beginning. Similarly, millennial thinking focuses on the belief that the world will end in an apocalyptic struggle.

When writers such as Lyon choose, or in some cases, acquiesce, to incorporate "postmodernism" into their work, this must occur while carefully recognizing the limitations and weaknesses of calling anything "postmodern." Among other definitions, "postmodern" can refer to stylistic movements in art and architecture, Jameson's notion of "the cultural logic" of the epoch of late capitalism, and the epochal positioning of society at the end of "modernism." With these three independent, yet intertwined, elements of the postmodern, it becomes problematic to refer to the postmodern or postmodernity in any sweeping way. Rather, distilling out elements of postmodern expression (e.g. Jameson's Bonaventure Hotel) and tendency (e.g. Baudrillard's simulacrum) may be more appropriate. In this way, my research on millennium-era cultural products has brushed up against postmodern expressions or tendencies, though I would not properly call my research or its subjects strictly "postmodern." Nonetheless, some elements of postmodern thought do help illuminate the cultural expressions and tendencies I investigated. Thus, I would like to discuss a few of the theories with postmodern strains, to help explain angels in a postmodern, millennial context. I do not wish to attempt to classify this study as particularly postmodern, but I do wish to make use of the ideas of such writers as Baudrillard and Jameson to sketch out some of the particular features of postmodern culture as an epochal construct, a time of certain forms of expression and tendency. As Featherstone (1991) argued, understanding contemporary culture sociologically should properly involve not postmodern sociology but a sociology of postmodernism.

To begin, Baudrillard (1970) theorized that today we no longer consume objects, if, indeed, we ever did. Rather, Baudrillard believes we consume symbols of objects that we accord meaning to through their operation in a system of images. Furthermore, this symbolic consumption happens less as a result of any actual need and more as a result of society's influence upon us. The plethora of angel imagery lapped up quickly by consumers reflects this notion. Clearly, the greeting card we purchase enables us to consume a symbol (a picture of an angel), since consuming the object itself (the angel) is intangible. Thus, we consume the "copy of a copy," because we purchase a greeting card with a print of Michelangelo's angel, though the original referent (not the painting, but the angel) was never really "real." Our consumption of the hyperreal angel illustrates

Baudrillard's concept of the *simulacrum*. I am not certain, however, that this consumption merely reflects society's influence upon us, as I see "angel consumption" as helping to fill a void of the "post-religious" secular condition.

As Stevenson (1995) claimed, however, "it is currently becoming fashionable to proclaim that Baudrillard is not a postmodernist after all" (p. 162). Jameson's brand of post-industrial thought (sometimes called postmodernism) evolved from Marxism and the shift from early to late capitalism (Featherstone, 1991). For some people, his writings have more relevance to the post-modern project (and more lucidity) than those of Baudrillard.

Like other postmodern scholars, Jameson (1991) noted that fragmentation results from postmodern epochal shifts. Jameson (1991) said the "breakdown of individuals' sense of identity through the bombardment of fragmented signs and images...erode all sense of continuity between past, present, and future" (p. 44). Imagery and portrayal of angels combine a pastiche of signs and images, placing historical myths and experiences alongside future-oriented focus. Jameson (1991) called this pastiche a "schizophrenic fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents" (p. 42). Similarly, the very examination of angels exhibits a pastiche of images and signs from a myriad of times and places. Of particular interest in the study of angel films discussed in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, when writing about film remakes, Jameson (1991) said "the allusive and elusive plagiarism of older plots is, of course, also a feature of pastiche" (p. 42). Two of the films in the study, *Meet Joe Black* and *City of Angels* were remakes of earlier films, *Death Takes a Holiday* and *Wings of Desire/Der Himmel Uber Berlines*, respectively. Popular and material culture have likewise treated angels in a fragmentary way, as the images and portrayals of angels emerge as a bricolage of angelic elements. For example, the television show *Touched by an Angel* blends elements of traditional Christianity with New Age spirituality for the angels it portrays. Essentially, Jameson (1991) argued that the treatment of historical periods in cultural forms may have less to do with the period they purport to reflect and everything to do with the period of the production and consumption of that cultural form.

Mike Featherstone (1991) brought issues of postmodernism squarely into the arena of consumer culture. He situated millennium-era culture in a position of post-modernity, in the sense of post-Enlightenment. In the era of modernity, the middle class emerged, and consumption, particularly conspicuous consumption, became romanticized (Featherstone, 1992). This practice continues today, of course, though consumption has changed through two evolutions. First, in the tradition of Horkheimer and Adorno of the Frankfurt School, artistic objects of consumption have become devalued from units with use-value to units with economically driven exchange value in the context of mass culture through the forces of modernity (Featherstone, 1992). Second, Featherstone (1992) echoed the ideas of Baudrillard with his contention that, just as use value dissolved into exchange value in modernity, exchange value has dissolved into sign value in postmodernity.

Of particular importance in the study of culture in the postmodern era, Featherstone (1991) sees a focus on changing power balances essential in the understanding of postmodernity. Typically, he argues, production has been characterized as male, while consumption tends to fall into the feminine area of control. This feminine consumption was seen as a negative force, characterized by excess and waste. Featherstone (1991), however, believes that changing power relations have begun to lift this particularly negative outlook on consumption.

In the context of postmodern consumption, Baudrillard commented on the collapsing of high and popular art, which has changed both the objects of consumption and the relation between producer and consumer. Jameson (1998) also wrote of the erosion of the boundary between high and low culture as symbolic of the postmodern era. The collectibles industry and the Internet provide contexts where the erosion of this boundary can become apparent. Angels are thus part of elite and "popular" culture simultaneously, as Raphael's cupids hang everywhere from the Sistine Chapel to shower rods in people's bathrooms.

Further, Baudrillard (1983) wrote that "all that reduplicates itself, even if it be the everyday and banal reality, falls by this token under the sign of art and becomes aestheticized" (p. 151). This aestheticization of the everyday affects two crucial power relations: between producer and consumer, and between men and women. The aestheticization of the everyday has particular import for women, as it adds significance to more traditionally feminine activities such as consumption and domesticity. This significance, in turn, gives women producers and distributors of cultural capital increased power. This force involves both positive and negative effects for women, however, as it simultaneously uplifts their traditional pursuits and also provides a backlash of sorts against women in a professional (non-domestic) context. The "Martha Stewart Syndrome" exalts the everyday into a cult of domesticity, raising to sacred proportions activities such as collecting Victoriana to create a haven in the home. As Featherstone (1991) wrote, "mundane and everyday consumer goods become associated with luxury, exotic, beauty, and romance with their original or functional 'use' increasingly difficult to decipher" (p. 85).

The prominence of culture and consumption in the era of late capitalism has also influenced the place of religion, at least in the field of sociology. Featherstone (1991) argued that in the field of sociology, the increase in interest in culture has occurred coterminously with a decrease in the interest of religion. In large part in North America, religion has moved from the public to the private, notwithstanding the public platforms of some religious groups such as the Promise Keepers and leaders such as George W. Bush, whose religion likely informs his political agenda. Echoing the ideas of Berger, Luckmann, and Lyon discussed earlier, Featherstone (1991) suggested that religion may serve as another "private leisure-time pursuit purchased in the market like any other consumer culture lifestyle" (p. 113). Featherstone (1991) wrote that "consumer culture is generally presented as being extremely destructive for religion in terms of its emphasis on hedonism, the pursuit of pleasure here and now, the cultivation of expressive lifestyles, the development of narcissistic and egoistic personality types" (p. 113). Ultimately, Featherstone (1991) concluded that consumerism does not bring about the eclipsing of religion, thought it may have a hand in redefining the sacred by bringing it into an everyday and material context. Religion has become more superficial and less concerned with the meaning of life.

Locating as he does contemporary cultural products in the era of late capitalism, Jameson (1991) gives significant attention to economic issues in terms of culture.

Jameson seems to favor the Marxist totalizing focus on market supremacy, and while I do not agree completely, I certainly do believe that the market serves as a central site for ideological struggle. I also see Jameson's point that postmodern markets are not, ideologically or practically speaking, free, as they are bound up with multinational corporations. Similarly, Jameson (1991) noted that "the media offers free programs in whose content and assortment the consumer has no choice whatsoever but whose selection is then rebaptized 'free choice'" (p. 275). This contention revisits the notion that postmodern culture focuses on consumption, rather than production or even products. Further, Jameson's take on Marxism suggests that consumption in the era of late capitalism results in a "hypercommodified world," though consumption becomes a rather privatized practice (Best & Kellner, 1997).

Though Lyon, Featherstone, Baudrillard, and Jameson in general focused more on the social sensibilities of the postmodern than the temporal aspect, time has indeed affected the presence of spirituality in society. In particular, the arrival (actual or imminent, depending on your chronological perspective) of the millennium has been played out in the contemporary social context, at least in the Western Hemisphere. Jameson (1991) identified a sense of "invented millenarianism" typical of the era of late capitalism, especially in the declaration of the "end" or "death" of things such as ideology, art, or the welfare state.

As I mentioned in an earlier portion of this dissertation, the proximity of the new millennium provides significant motivation for me to undertake this project. I hypothesized that the dawn of the millennium, bringing with it apocalyptic conditions and thinking, provides a central rationale for the belief in angels in contemporary culture. I am not alone in this hypothesis, either. Academic and popular writers have taken up issues of the millennium across a spectrum of disciplines, theorizing and predicting millennium occurrences and trends. The next few paragraphs detail some of the academic literature on the subject of the millennium, providing definitions for terms such as *millenarian* and *millennial*, and it then discusses possible relationships between millennial thinking and belief in angels.

On the subject of the millennium, Mark Kingwell (1996), a philosophy professor from the University of Toronto, wrote *Dreams of Millennium: Report from a Culture on the Brink,* which discussed the cultural forces of millennium thinking. Kingwell (1996) turned his attention away from common observations about the millennium, and he focused instead on the meanings people ascribe to being on the brink of a new millennium, particularly the dichotomous terms of gloom and hope. As he wrote, "Each age must produce for its own consumption a vision of what the future will hold" (p. 3). To this end, Kingwell (1996) reflected on his childhood viewing of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which produced an image of the future constructed around the violence of technology. He wrote "the dangerous journey, the odyssey that will test all our reserves of will and courage, is the journey into the heart of our millennial anxiety—the journey into ourselves" (1996, p. 5). Thus, Kingwell tacitly embraced the Berger-Luckmann paradigm of the social construction of reality, the theoretical approach I take in this dissertation.

In order to discuss effectively the social construction of millennium issues, I must first define two key, related terms: millenarianism and millennialism. Although some authors use these terms interchangeably, I have elicited general definitions from my survey of the literature that will help distinguish the two terms. First, *millenarianism* refers to the (largely, though not exclusively Christian) belief that a literal apocalypse will occur, signaling the end of the world. Closely related to the concept of millenarianism, *apocalypse* refers to "those forms of Christian belief that emphasize a conviction of Christ's imminent return and the effect this should have on daily life and practice" (McGinn, 1997, p. 75). In this vein, apocalypse can have both a pessimistic and optimistic side, as people realize the capacity for destruction, while this knowledge can engender a fundamental change in those destructive forces. The term *millennial*, on the other hand, usually refers to issues clearly tied to the chronological dawning of the third millennium C.E. Although much "millennial" thinking does relate to apocalyptic prophecies, the millennial apocalypse is more terrestrial, rather than celestial, and has more metaphoric, rather than literal, connotations.

As Kingwell (1996) wrote, "Nobody invented the apocalyptic facts of our end-of-millennium culture—free-falling economics, drastic overpopulation, wars, and famines—

but our projections of imagination onto these events (phantasies, in Freudian usage) express at least as much about the state of the world as they do about our desires and wishes for the world" (p. 15). Kingwell (1996) went on to say that "the dreams of millennium…are…monsters from the id. They are the dark things we wish did not belong to us. They are the real-world expressions of anxiety, of the commingled hopes and dreads that mark our dreaming hours" (p. 15)

In a further development of the negative aspects of the millennium, Strozier (1997) wrote "it is astonishing that a mere date should work its way through a culture in so many different ways. Undoubtedly, death figures centrally. It is, after all, knowledge of our own earth that distinguishes humanity and is an important part of the process in the creation of culture. We also know of the apocalyptic, or collective death, because we all die. Knowledge of our own death allows us creatively to extend that knowing into an imagining of universal endings" (p. x). In this age of apocalypse, angels, as symbols of death, thus have an important link with millennial thinking.[4]

The popular press has also embraced millennium issues, most likely as a function of both people's desire to know more about the millennium as well as the potential for commercial success for these books. Of course, a number of books focus on the anticipated "Year 2000" problem that will strike computers at the second of the dawn of the new millennium, such as Hyatt's (1998) *The Millennium Bug: How to Survive the Coming Chaos.* Other popular works focus on spirituality in the new millennium, ranging from Rausch's (1996) traditional *Catholicism at the Dawn of the Third Millennium*, and the DuQuette's "New Age" themed (1997) *Angels, Demons, and Gods of the New Millennium.*

Clearly, the era of the millennium has spurred on cultural trends such as a reorientation to religious symbols. In particular, Kingwell (1996) observed that angels have become so prevalent in millennium-era culture because they provide protection from apocalyptic millennial issues. Kingwell (1996) saw this guardian role of angels as particularly important, as "they clearly satisfy a common human desire for personal protection, for a sense of accommodation. The angels' message of spiritual okayness is vastly more popular, and more attractive, than the stern directives of traditional religious beliefs" (p. 301). Thus, believing in angels "allows people to feel that the spiritual link they crave is welcoming and warm, not cold and judgmental" (Kingwell, 1996, p. 301). Kingwell (1996) goes on to observe that "angels, like the nameless Higher Power, have a chummy, personal aspect to them that gives solace to all the children of dysfunctional families who populate self-help meetings and co-dependency seminars. This is religion without the tradition, the ritual, or the risk; it is commitment-free and, in the end, narcissistic. Your personal angel is really like the supportive big brother or sister you never had" (p. 67). Thus, angels have a special place in millennial spirituality not only as a result of the belief in their apocalyptic role, but also because believing in angels allows people to consume a pleasant, appealing form of spirituality.

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[4] This link becomes apparent in cultural products such as Tony Kushner's play "Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes," a dramatic work that likens the AIDS epidemic to an apocalypse. In a recent survey of 1997 and 1998 dissertation abstracts, I found 31 dissertations with the term "angel" in the title. Though most of the dissertations were in fields such as theology and literature, the most closely "sociological" discussion of angels in this examination came in the fields of Gay/Lesbian and Theatre Studies, with five studies on Kushner's play.

Attention to the millennium has informed my dissertation in a number of ways. I addressed issues of timing and how this affects forms of spirituality people selectively consume. As well, I investigated the role people have constructed for angels as symbols of both death and protection in response to a real or metaphorical millennial apocalypse. Millennium issues surfaced in all of the elements of my research, beginning with my literature review on cultural treatments of angels. Furthermore, I examined millennial themes alongside portrayal of angels in cultural products in the media, a retail outlet, and Websites. This research also revealed the preoccupation with angels as a function of millennial thinking, and my comparisons of all the elements of my empirical research reflect temporal issues relating to the millennium.

These theories about the postmodern (millennium) era of late capitalism will form the backdrop for my literature review and empirical research. Again, I stress my focus on the contemporary relationship between angel signifiers and signifieds as intermediaries between God and humans as North American culture reconciles the impact of secularization on the "sacred canopy" religion has traditionally maintained. This relationship between signifier and signified, while constructed by the producers of cultural products, becomes truly activated through consumption

Consumption and the Consuming Subject in the Millennium Era

Baudrillard and Jameson, in their discussions of the postmodern era, and Berger, Luckmann, and Lyon, in their discussions of the face of religion in contemporary society, stress the centrality of consumption to culture in general and religion in particular. Berger and Luckmann present the societal condition of secularization, and they argue that this secularization has enabled people to become active consumers of religion and spirituality in a variety of new forms. Some theorists of postmodernity, such as Jameson and Baudrillard, focus on the epochal location of the sign-value of consumables, acknowledging the frequent disconnection of signifiers from signifieds. Other scholars have identified the economic forces that drive the creation of cultural products for consumption.

John Fiske, in his 1993 book *Power Play, Power Works*, emphasized the power relations inherent in the production and consumption of culture, but he did so while also acknowledging the potential for consumers to circumvent the "powerbloc" through resistant and empowering forms of production and consumption. Fiske (1993) argued, in the tradition of Stuart Hall's *Encoding/decoding,* that the powerbloc prescribes a station for people, which makes the dominant reading preferential from the powerbloc's perspective. Consumers, in contrast, can and do construct a locale as a means of "confronting, resisting, or invading imperialization" (p. 12), similar to Hall's resistant or negotiated readings.

With this concept in mind, Fiske (1993) questioned whether consumers in the late capitalist era all exist as subjects of the dominant ideology, or whether at least some consumers exercise their own agency in the ideological struggle with the powerbloc. Classical Marxism paints an incomplete picture of this issue of domination in the US, according to Fiske (1993), as class, race, and even gender take on different forms in the North American context. Rather, Fiske (1993) preferred Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony, which allows for consensual (or consent-ual) subjection to the powerbloc. As well, Fiske (1993) appreciated Michel de Certeau's *Practice of Everyday Life* for its allowance of the possibility for subordinates to resist, and the potential for subordinates to mask this resistance while masquerading as proper subjects for the powerbloc. In Fiske's example, a group of homeless men watch the movie *Diehard*, turning it off the before the end of the film, before power is restored to the capitalist imperialists depicted in the film.

While resistance may seem an unlikely concept to apply to the consumption of angel-related cultural products, I believe that it does have this potential. Angel imagery has a very specific Judeo-Christian historical context for the "dominant" relationship between signifier and signified, as the next chapter on the history of angelic imagery will discuss. The divorcing of the traditional relationships between the signifier and signified provides a site for resistant readings. Thus, though the imagery has often been male, female angel images can denote a more feminine interpretation of spirituality. Likewise, people may feel a sense of peace by having angel imagery refer to dead loved ones who now guard their earthly charges from an angelic vantage point, despite clear Biblical reference to the non-human nature of angels. Consuming angelic imagery also provides an opportunity for power to "subordinate" persons. Thus, women who feel impotent in a male-dominated society can vicariously experience power through owning—and thus controlling—an angel collectible. Fiske (1993) echoed this importance of consumption for people when he wrote "one reason that popular culture matters so much to people is its ability to provide peaks of intense experience when the body identifies with its external conditions, and thus shakes free from the repressive difference between *their* control and *our* sense of identity" (p. 89). Fiske (1993) also identified the possibility of "belittlement," whereby people's consumption of culture is seen as inappropriate or hysterical (in very much the "feminine" sense of the word). His primary example, the quasi-religious Elvis culture and its primarily female fans, evaded the containment of women the powerbloc sought to achieve in the post-war years. As Fiske (1993) wrote, "belittlement is part of the social reality of the formations among which popular knowledge circulates: it is that from which, in their evasive forms, they attempt to hide" (p. 185). In particular, Fiske (1993) saw those Elvis fans that refused to believe in his death as presented by the powerbloc, because this belief would make the extraordinary

(Elvis) merely ordinary. These fans' evasion of the "scientific rationalism" that "proved" Elvis's death enables them to thus evade control by the powerbloc. Fiske (1993) argued that "scientific rationalism may be able to paint the big picture, but down among the details of everyday life it often fails to provide explanations that are of any help in guiding behavior or that offer any hope of improving one's lot. And superstitions flourish when people feel unable to exert reasonably effective control over their lives: in these conditions, the non-scientific makes more sense" (p. 190). In the millennium era, belief in angels, particularly belief not entirely consistent with scriptural teaching, can provide a sort of "appropriate" superstition for people to express the inability for scientific rationalism to provide complete explanations.

Fiske (1993) also argued that this dichotomy between science and superstition reflected the male/female and the public/private dichotomies. He asserted that through circumventing the powerbloc (male, scientific, and public) knowledge, people could create popular knowledge that, through social construction, becomes in some way real. This popular knowledge enables people to gain control from the powerbloc over some aspect of their lives.

In a later work, *Media Matters*, Fiske (1994) argued that signification in the postmodern era is not nonexistent, and therefore completely polysemous, but "more complicated, remote, and arbitrary" (p.100) and dependent on economic imperatives. In that work, Fiske (1994) identified *thirtysomething* as a particularly important television program from the consumption perspective. First, producers developed the program in order to "deliver" the baby boomer market segment to advertisers. Second, it brought counter-revolutionary ideology to these baby boomers through its subltly crafted messages emphasizing the importance of women staying at home with their children and the shift from public political activism to inward focus on family and spirituality.

Similarly, Andersen (1995) iterated that a close relationship exists between consumer culture and television programming, citing product placements in programs such as Northern Exposure and partnerships between NBC and Kelloggs that create a "synergy" between television programs and the marketing of products. She traced the current relationship between advertising and television programming to deregulation and the changing environment of the 1980s, which allowed more commercial opportunities on more television stations. As well, she reminded of the emotional focus of advertising, encouraging consumers to identify psychologically with products through advertising techniques.

Andersen (1995) wrote that in postmodernity, focus on media and cultural products has shifted from production to reproduction. In the media, the postmodern legacy is the lost referent, or the disconnection of a sign from its meaning. Thus, the angel sign becomes divorced from its original meaning in Judeo-Christian religion. Through the postmodern focus on the aesthetic, the everyday or banal becomes aesthetic. Andersen (1995) also noted that the postmodern no longer focuses on production and commodity in consumer culture; rather, the focus shifts to consumption. Ultimately, as a result, Fiske (1994) argued, television texts have become self-conscious or self-reflexive, due to the commercial control advertisers exert over programming.

With this focus on consumption in cultural matters, the consumer's relationship to product and producer becomes especially important. In order to understand the place of the subject in the era of late capitalism, I will call upon some theories of postmodernism and will touch briefly on the ideas of Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Zizek. I am open to a number of interpretations of the subject, as I intend to focus more on the epochal positioning of the millennium-era consuming subject, rather than any one, exclusive conception of the subject. In particular, while Lacan provides some intriguing ideas on subjectivity that I believe have applicability for this project, an attempt to provide a complete application of his theories lies well beyond the scope of this study. Rather, I look more narrowly at some of the aspects of his ideas about subjectivity and the centrality of language to construction of subjective identity. This concentration is germane to the structuralist origins of semiotics, the methodology used for the empirical research in this study, discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Lacan, typically associated with psychoanalytic theory, also has an association with structuralism, post-structuralism, and post-modernism through his own work and his inspiration of the work of scholars such as Jameson, Baudrillard, and Zizek. Lacan's rereading of classical Freudian psychoanalysis stresses the importance of language to the subject. In fact, language and discourse construct the subject, thus decentering the self. Lacan's (post) structuralist focus on language and notion that the subject is constructed through discourse remain particularly consistent with the focus of this project in terms of the constructionist view and semiotic method.

In essence, Lacan (1977) identified the "mirror stage" as the first step in psychological development. In this stage, the subject (infant) discovers him or herself in the mirror and begins to identify him or herself as a subject, separate from others. The child, however, constructs this subjectivity based on an image, thus misidentifying him or herself with this image, and thus creating, for Lacan, the (imaginary) ego. As Nobus (1999) suggested, this mirror image becomes an idealized version of the subject, a vision that the subject cannot realize. In this vein, I argue that angelic imagery functions as a sort of mirror to human subjects. People want to see themselves in the divine, or the divine in themselves, and constructing human-like images of angels engenders this identification. As I will discuss in the later chapters of this project, the computer screen, and to a lesser extent the television screen, allows the subject to further identify with images of angels behind the screen.

The construction of self that occurs in the mirror stage, because it is imaginary, encompasses no "lack" (Lacan 1977). As well, in identifying the self, the infant also comes to recognize the other as, now, separate from self. This understanding allows the child to enter the symbolic stage, where the child continues to develop understanding of self vs. other and lack. In the symbolic stage, the child desires to be the "Other," an unattainable desire (Lacan, 1977). Of central importance, the *l'object petit a(utre)*, the search for an object that does not exist, allows us to constantly seek to fulfill our desire, though this desire always remains unfulfilled. Lacan (1977) equated this position of "Other" with the "Name of the Father," a symbolic position with religious roots (p. 67, p. 199). This allows for the potential to position this "Other" as God in the context of angel imagery in cultural products. Verhaeghe (1999) insisted that "the subject wants to be loved/desired by the Other and models/alienates him or herself on the image of what s/he thinks is desirable for this other" (p. 180). I believe that many people want God's acceptance and love, and constructing angels as humans enables them to model a reflection of themselves on God's messengers.

The construction of individual subjectivity and angelic "subjectivity," then, develops through discourse with other subjects as well as "the discourse of the Other," a linguistic collective unconscious of sorts. Lacan (1977) wrote "the subject goes well beyond what is experienced subjectively by the individual" (p. 55) through the "omnipresence of human discourse" (p. 56). In the context of this study, this linguistic collective unconscious would provide for a repository of images of angels from throughout history. Thus, creators of cultural products featuring angels could call upon this repository, often unwittingly, in their construction of angel signifiers. This construction could render traditional relationships between signifiers and signifieds as immaterial in a contemporary context.

In discourse, the unattainable desire is played out, and *glissement* occurs, separating signifiers from signifieds. Lacan (1977) saw signifiers as acting in concert with other signifiers to form a "signifying chain." He wrote "[s]ince Freud, the unconscious has been a chain of signifers that somewhere (on another stage, in another scene, he wrote) is repeated…" (p. 297).

Although Lacan's theories have been highly influential, to refocus on the subject in terms of the consumption of culture, I turn briefly to the work of Slavoj Zizek, who uses a Lacanian approach to his study of popular culture.

Zizek (1991) sees as particularly important the notion of fantasy as an imagined means for the subject to realize his or her desire. The Lacanian notion of the unattainable search to fulfill desire allows for "the dream paradox of a continuous approach to an object that nevertheless preserves a constant distance" (Zizek, 1991, p. 4). This constant pursuit of the unattainable creates subjects. As Zizek (1991) maintained, Lacan saw anxiety as caused by lack of desire, not desire for an object that one lacks. Thus, pursuing the unattainable creates, in fact, a desire-able state. The human who pursues a relationship with an angel-object, such as in the films *Meet Joe Black* and *City of Angels*, thus creates a more enviable position in the pursuit, rather than the catch.

Zizek (1991) also reiterated the Freudian and Lacanian emphasis on the death drive, and he illustrated the presence of this drive in popular culture. Relying on examples such as the films *Night of the Living Dead* and *Halloween*, Zizek (1991) wrote that "if there is a phenomenon that fully deserves to be called the 'fundamental fantasy of contemporary mass culture,' it is this fantasy of the return of the living dead: the fantasy of a person who does not want to stay dead but returns again and again to pose a threat to the living" (p. 22). In general, in these popular culture products, the dead return because of some unpaid debt or some inability to position themselves properly in the afterlife. Similarly, the angel characters in the television and film case studies discussed later in this dissertation experience either a sense of "lack" (typically of sexual experiences) or a "debt" to serve God as guardian angels.

Zizek (1991) also identifies the "phantom lady" in popular culture examples such as Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes.*[5] This woman may never exist, and her construction as an "ideal" woman makes this existence seemingly unlikely, and the possibility of a sexual relationship even more unlikely. Regarding this type of sublime image, Zizek (1991) wrote, "Sublimation is usually equated with desexualization, i.e. with the displacement of libidinal cathexis from the 'brute' object alleged to satisfy some baser drive to an 'elevated,' 'cultivated' form of satisfaction" (Zizek, 1991, p. 83). Thus, the construction of sublime images of angels, particularly males in the films *Meet Joe Black, Michael,* and *City of Angels,* serves to desexualize them into appropriately angelic characters. Fowkes (1996), too, recognized the tendency to feminize male lead characters, though she writes of ghostly characters in films such as *Ghost*.

The eventual "death" of these angelic and ghostly characters, whether through their return to the afterlife or their decision to become human, encompasses some sort of loss, though it also means that through this loss the angel character becomes all the more desirable. Writing of *Vertigo*, Zizek (1991) noted "Her death does not entail a loss of her power of fascination; quite the contrary, it is her very death that 'authenticates,' her absolute hold on the subject" (p. 86). Similarly, the death, whether real or symbolic, of angel characters in popular culture, seems to function as a continued source of fascination for the consumers of these products.

In a later work, Zizek's (1999) article *The Seven Veils of Fantasy* continues to use the Lacanian notion of fantasy to explore examples of popular culture. Fantasy is intersubjective, and we fantasize about something, at least in part, because achieving the fantasy will make the Other happy (Zizek, 1999). Revisiting the notion of Other as God, fantasizing about angels, and exploring subjectivity in relation to angels, provides a way for people to fulfill their belief that they will receive God's approval through belief in angels. These fantasies, however, typically come in media not typically associated with the divine. As Zizek (1999) asserted, "popular melodrama and kitsch are much closer to fantasy than 'true art'," which presumably attempts to replicate the "real." (p. 205). This observation makes the focus for this study on popular culture products such as Hollywood films, television programs, and collectibles an appropriate venue by which to examine this fantasy element in the construction of angels in contemporary culture.

Methodology

As the previous section indicates, a focus on consumption and the consuming subject provides the most appropriate mode of examination for the presence of angels in millennium era culture. A total focus on consumption, however, does not give proper attention to the text and the production context surrounding the creation of the text, and the methodology used for an examination such as this study should reflect this notion accordingly. The constructivist paradigm of Berger and Luckmann and the (post)structuralist foundation of Lacan, Baudrillard, and Jameson that form the theoretical basis of this project lend themselves suitably to semiotics as the method of inquiry for this project. After a brief assessment of how these theories and the methodology relate to one another, this section of the chapter presents a discussion of the importance of contextualizing media studies, followed by more specific presentation of the tenets of semiotics and the techniques used for the empirical work in this project.

Social semiotics represents to me the most appropriate, if imperfect, methodology to bring together the diverse texts I investigated. At times my analysis of texts such as

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[5] In this film, the "hero" meets a person who later disappears, and the hero cannot find any trace of her. Everyone who, apparently, saw the hero with the vanishing lady does not remember seeing them together at

films and television programs focused more on the narrative aspects of semiotics rather than the latent meaning of signs. Furthermore, the plethora and diversity of the signs in the material culture and website research made detailed semiotic analysis of individual signs quite challenging, requiring me to look more at representative significations rather than specific ones. Nonetheless, social semiotics creates a bridge between these narrative constructions and the more visual texts of material culture and websites.

The pastiche of theories I used in this study further problematized the use of semiotics. The structuralist origins of semiotics have received criticism, particularly for the logocentric focus on the text and the assumption of a necessary signifier/signified relationship. Later, post-structuralist and postmodern approaches, such as those of Baudrillard, have emphasized the lack of connection between signifiers and signifieds. Gottdiener (1995) argued, however, that strictly "postmodern" semiotic approaches resulted in overly impressionistic work as compared to earlier structuralist approaches (p. 1). While the postmodern focus on polysemy and difference adds to earlier work, Gottdiener (1995) carefully suggested that practical constraints eradicate the postmodern potential for infinite polysemy (p. 24). Rather, he insisted that "meanings are grounded in everyday life experiences" (p. 267). Thus, social semiotics with its emphasis on context, discourse, and ideology beyond actual signification presents an appropriate détente among the potentially incommensurate palette of theories that informed this study. In fact, signs and contexts suggest an excellent continuity to bridge the various theories. While social semiotics may not provide a perfect methodology, it does represent what I see as the most appropriate mode of inquiry across the diversity of texts and theories that I used.

Contextual Elements of Media Angels

To begin a discussion of the centrality of context to studies of culture, I turn to Stuart Hall's (1980) exemplary work, *Encoding/decoding*, which conceived of media as distinct but interrelated moments of production, consumption, and reproduction. Hall's theory posited that the production and reception of media products involves the infusion

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of meaning and political ideology, and thus any examination of cultural products must include contextualization to understand the construction of meaning during the entire communication process. In a later work, *Representation*, Hall (1997) wrote, "representation through language is therefore central to the processes by which meaning is produced" (p. 1). He wrote of the "cultural turn," whereby meanings—processes, reproduction, exchange—enjoyed centrality in academic circles. For signification and representation to occur, of course, a shared language becomes necessary. In the cultural turn, culture became a fundamental shaping, constructive force in society, not a result of society. Scholars turned more serious attention to discourses (the effects of representation in terms of power, politics, etc.) and semiotics (the "how" of representation).

In this vein, Hall (1997) made use of the Foucauldian focus on power and discourse in the institutional context and the way power relations inherent in a text serve to construct certain positions for the subject. For example, producers privilege certain readings, and consumers often assume some level of trust that producers have created "accurate" texts. Further, in the Foucauldian sense, viewing exerts some level of power over that which is viewed. The discourse/text can also subject people without their conscious agreement. For example the gendered positioning of angels in film and television creates certain subject/positions for consumers in terms of gendered consumption.

At the level of production, I will mention the economic and ideological forces at work when I present the results of my empirical research on television and film, collectibles, and websites. In particular, the political economy of culture shapes what mass-market films and television programs get produced, and it also shapes the finished products. As well, the perceived economic viability of a cultural product (including such elements as the casting of the lead roles) strongly impacts whether or not the text gets produced at all. In *Encoding/decoding* and his other work, Hall acknowledged the ideological struggles that take place at the production moment including such issues as male dominance in Hollywood and on the Internet, compared with the more feminine realm of angel-themed retail stores. In a broader sense, the socio-historical epoch also shapes production, and this issue will form the backdrop of the "literature" review in the next chapter. As well, as I have mentioned previously in this chapter, and as the title of this project reminds, the millennium era situates all of the empirical research in a particular epochal time frame.

The text itself is also wrapped up in the production "moment." Hall (1980) reminded that certain codes reflect the production context, whether the culture or the ideological background of the producers. The producers of texts make choices to use particular signifiers in particular ways, and the goal of semiotics is to unpack these intended signifier/signified relationships. Of course, theorists such as Lacan, Baudrillard, and Jameson suggest that, in the era of postmodernism, the signifier/signified relationship has dissolved. While recognizing this possibility, I maintain that a semiotic study can nonetheless delineate some of the ways in which the signifier/signified can relate. Furthermore, semiotics provides the most appropriate means to analyze a variety of "texts" from figurines to Biblical scriptures to television programs.

The study of any text, though, should properly converge on the moment of consumption, for even the semiotic scholar must consume the text in order to examine it, by definition. Hall (1980) maintained that the consumption of a text might take many forms, though not an infinite number as theorists of the postmodern might postulate. For Hall (1980), the producers construct a dominant or preferred reading, yet consumers can negotiate the dominant reading into a more localized or personal reading, and they can even create an oppositional reading quite contrary to the dominant one. This consumption requires the positioning of the subject/consumer in particular ways in relation to the text, whether a film or an Internet website.

Beyond Hall's models, examination of the production elements of cultural texts involves investigating the issues that influence how and why producers decide to endorse particular projects. In an early study of the field of film, Hortense Powdermaker (1950) used ethnographic techniques to examine power relations in Hollywood. Her study evidenced how business executives exert power over artists and thus how economic concerns drive the production of media texts, a phenomenon that has become magnified as the years have passed. Thus, the prevalence of "angel" imagery in the media rests on the assumption that producers use this imagery essentially because it engenders commercial success, rather than solely as a result of their desire to further a religious agenda or because of some sort of artistic vision. While this study does make mention of the production moment, it does not investigate the opinions and motivations of media, collectible, or website producers in any detailed way. I did, however, interview retail storeowners, the distributors of angel-themed products, and I looked into producers' background and motivations through secondary or "static" sources such as articles or studio websites.

Of course, audience expectations also drive the production of programs, especially as these expectations translate into economic success. As Espinosa (1982) discovered in his ethnographic study of *The Lou Grant Show*, producers of television programs seek to engage audiences by understanding audience knowledge of the world and meeting their expectations for the media event (p. 79). As a result of the economic imperative, quality of the product and artistic concerns often become irrelevant. Of course, since media producers have economic and political power, they can also make ideological decisions about what to show to audiences, which according to the Gramscian tradition results in the populace's hegemonic acceptance of the dominant ideology.

To understand the subtleties of how political and economic concerns impact the media texts that audiences consume, many cultural studies scholars turn from traditional effects or uses and gratifications research to more ethnographic methods. For example, David Morley (1986) and Ien Ang (1985), and Julie D'Acci (1994) in feminist cultural studies, advocate these more interpretive methods to examine the meaning of the messages that audiences take from the texts and the cultural factors of these meanings. Owing to the limitations of this study, extensive ethnographic research methods were not possible, particularly with the media texts. Interviews with retail storeowners and observations in the stores allowed for insight into consumers' habits. As well, detailed textual readings of websites, particularly interactive elements such as bulletin boards, revealed ethnographic details about the consumers/producers of these sites.

In addition to these methods of cultural studies scholars, discourse theories aim to include issues of context in any study of cultural products and artifacts. Further, discourse theories have both theoretical and methodological importance for this study. Theoretically, discourse theory illustrates how cultural products, as well as their production and consumption, have wide-reaching social implications. The methods through which I will examine the socio-cultural experience of angels, focused around social semiotics, rest on conceptions of discourse as social practice.

To categorize discourse theory in simple terms, Morrow (1994) wrote "[t]he study of narrative and discourse is concerned with the analysis of meanings within social life" (p. 259). A more specific definition of "discourse," however, proves challenging, as theorists interpret the term in different ways. As Meihoff (1994) noted, "discourse has become one of the most widely and often confusingly used terms in recent theories in the arts and social sciences, without a clearly definable, single unifying concept" (p. 1961, as quoted in Morrow, 1994, p. 262).

Scholarly experts such as Fairclough (1992), Hodge and Kress (1988) and Allen (1987) saw discourse as the social process in which sets of symbols (texts) are produced and consumed, thus reflecting the social values central to a particular socio-historical cultural context. This definition strongly echoes the social construction of reality tenets of Berger and Luckmann (1966). Through the production, distribution, and consumption of these texts, discourses shape and are shaped by social interaction at the level of the individual, interpersonal relations, and societal structures. Ideologies, particularly the dominant ideology in a specific socio-cultural context, impact the production of texts (what gets produced by whom), the texts themselves (how the producers infuse texts with meanings) and the consumption of texts (the array of ways that readers process these texts).

As previously mentioned, the methods I will use for this dissertation rest on the discourse theories put forth by the scholars mentioned in this section. In particular, these theories of discourse, especially issues related to ideology, will serve as a foundation for the more detailed semiotic analyses of texts. The next section discusses the import of discourse theory into semiotic analysis.

Context/Discourse and Semiotics

As Jensen and Jankowski (1991) wrote about discourse, "the underlying assumption is that language is the primary medium of interchange between humans and reality...and that accordingly, verbal texts become vehicles of knowledge and truth" (p. 19). They go on to say that "discourse now is said to include everyday interaction and its categories of consciousness, thus constituting the medium of the social construction of reality" (p.19). In comparison to other forms of textual analysis, semiology moves away from a strictly "literary criticism" perspective on the isolated text (whether written, televisual, or otherwise) towards the interplay of systems of signs in a social context (Jensen and Jankowski, 1991). It looks beyond the aesthetic value of texts to attempt to understand the underlying structure.[6]

Hodge and Kress (1988) credited Volishnov with central importance in questioning the Saussurian notion that speech acts are an individual phenomenon. Instead, Volishnov's insistence that the speech act is instead a social act provides for Hodge and Kress the foundation for the development of social semiotics. Hodge and Kress (1988) emphasized that the context of signifying systems imparts as much meaning as the signs themselves.

People usually remain unaware of the underlying structures that govern language use, though structural semiotics attempts to make these structures more readily apparent. Infusing structural semiotics with social context begins to etch out how these underlying structures become real in some sense through our social interactions and relationships. These structures do not become empirically visible in the traditional sense; rather, we see these structures in our attempts to understand how our intersubjective relationships and social structures drive the way we create meaning. As Strinati (1995) wrote, "semiology agrees that material reality can never be taken for granted, imposing its meaning upon human beings. Reality is always constructed, and made intelligible to human understanding by culturally specific systems of meaning" (p. 109). Structural semiotics focuses, in essence, on the text and textual analysis, while social semiotics attempts to infuse the reader into the analysis. As well, social semiotics looks more contextually at how power and ideology impacts the production and consumption of the text. While I used specific strategies of structural semiotics in my analysis, I also attempted to incorporate a broad application of social semiotics through accessing critical and other readings of the texts through analysis of the contextual features of the cultural products I studied.

Will Wright's (1975) *Sixguns and Society: A Structural Analysis of the Western* provides an especially accessible and thorough semiotic study, which informed this study. In particular, his examination of the idea of myth has application to this study of angels in contemporary culture. Wright (1975) saw myth "as consisting of two analytically separable components: an abstract structure through which the human mind imposes a necessary order and a symbolic content through which the formal structure is applied to contingent, socially defined experience" (p. 11). The myth enables people to consume a cultural product in a socially meaningful way that enables individuals to understand society and, by extension, themselves. Similarly, Hall (1997) suggested that myths are created to make natural that which is constructed. Further, Wright (1975) wrote of Levi-Strauss's notion of myth as "an intellectual means for resolving a conceptual contradiction or duality in a particular society" (p. 203). I see angels as one type of myth.

Wright (1975) also insisted that the structural presentation of myths in cultural products must coalesce around audience expectations in order to be commercially successful and, therefore, touch the widest range of people. Of course, producers of cultural products may influence audience expectations. These ideas reflect the media studies by Powdermaker (1950) and Espinosa (1982) discussed earlier. Wright (1975) used the work of Kenneth Burke, Claude Levi-Strauss, and Vladmir Propp on the structure of myth. He identified particular narrative/mythic functions and variations shared by the Western genre. These functions allow for the archetypal representation of characters and social situations with which viewers will identify, particularly in the form of oppositions. (For example, in the Western, the dichotomy is the individual vs. society,

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[6] Jensen and Jankowksi (1991) suggest that this move away from the automatic one-to-one correspondence between signifier and signified arose in part, from the Impressionist movement in art in the late 19th

whereas in the angel genre, discussed later, the dichotomy that must be resolved is a reconciliation between the rational and the spiritual.) Thus, production and consumption involve more the ritual than the rational (Wright, 1975).

Wright (1975) asserted that "the receivers of the myth learn how to act by recognizing their own situation in it and observing how it is resolved" (p. 186). Wright (1975) wrote of the changing myths represented by the western, as reflective of the changing societal institutions. Myths tell stories that provide entertaining ways to learn about ourselves. Mythic narratives focus on changes, and they allow us to see relevant events rather than be forced to interpret what is and is not relevant. Thus, a film about an angel interacting with humans enables viewers to see seeming coincidences as acts of angelic intervention.

Theory and Methods of Semiotic Analysis

For this dissertation, and in the tradition of Wright and other scholars, I have elected to use qualitative methods of inquiry, such as the semiotic analyses discussed previously. Jensen and Jankowski (1991) wrote that "semiotics...has proposed to study manifold social phenomena as signs with reference to their uses in cultural, political, and religious practices" (p. 3). They echoed other work in their suggestion that the qualitative turn focuses more on *Geisteswissenchaften* (human sciences), while quantitative inquiry looks instead to *Naturwissenschaften* (natural sciences). In media studies, qualitative research seeks to understand meaning and the process by which meaning is created and reproduced. Quantitative approaches, then, attempt to examine more discrete chunks of information, looking more at media products relatively devoid of the process (Jensen and Jankowski, 1991). While Jensen and Jankowski (1991) allowed that the qualitative/quantitative dichotomy has a stronghold in social scientific inquiry, they also suggested opportunities to narrow this dichotomy, such as through methods like semiotics, may advance the field. The techniques I use for my analysis, discussed in the next section, include specific analytical categories, yet also necessitate qualitative, interpretive analysis.

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century. This movement, too, questioned realist representation.

To highlight the bridge between the theory and method I use, Chandler (1999) did an excellent job of emphasizing the relationship between semiotics and the overall approach of this study (the social construction of reality) when he wrote "[w]hereas 'common-sense' insists that reality is independent of the signs which refer to it, semiotics emphasizes the role of sign systems in the construction of reality" (p. 2). This section outlines the origins of semiotics, defines key terms involved in a semiotic analysis, addresses criticism of semiotic analysis, and finally presents the specific techniques used in the case studies of this research project.

Overview of Semiotics

Semiological analysis was born out of the work of philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce and linguist Ferdinand De Saussure. Peirce examined three elements of the sign: icon, index, and symbol (Berger, 1982). Saussure divided signs into two components: the signifier (what is perceived) and the signified (what is meant by the perception). The sign that we perceive is the signifier, and the signified is one of the possible meanings. Signification, then, happens when a reader assigns a particular meaning to a particular sign. Conventions, unwritten rules about the processing of codes that result from our socialization, guide this process. Thus, both the producer and consumer of the sign structure its meaning. The relationships between signifier and signified can be characterized as polysemous, though perhaps not infinitely so (Wright, 1975; Gottdeiner, 1995). As well, signs have particular importance because of the oppositional relationships among signs (Saussure, 1962, as discussed in Berger, 1982). Thus, we come to know what "angel' means in part because of the juxtapositioning, whether real or imagined, between "angel" and "devil." From these roots, semiological analysis has developed with an especially strong foothold in Europe and somewhat less support in the US. Claude Levi-Strauss and Roland Barthes developed the field.

To understand the field of semiotics at a deeper level, I will review some key terms of the field that I will later discuss in the case study analyses. To begin, Hawkes (1977) presented two key features of Saussurian linguistics that mark the departure from earlier linguistic structures (as discussed in Silverman, 1993). First, Saussure eschewed the notion that words and meanings have a fixed correspondence, embracing instead a more fluid conceptualization of systems of symbols. Second, Saussure focused more on synchronic analysis rather than diachronic analysis, supported by his notion that meaning changes depending on temporal context. Both of these features of Saussurian analysis underpin the structural and social semiotics used in this study.

To outline semiotic analysis in more particular terms, there are two key types of semiological analysis: syntagmic and paradigmatic (Berger, 1982). Syntagmic analysis, developed particularly in the work of Vladimir Propp and his examination of fairy tales, focuses on the narrative structure of a cultural artifact (Berger, 1982). Arthur Asa Berger (1982) suggested that syntagmic analysis examines the manifest meaning of cultural artifacts, while paradigmatic analysis seeks to uncover the latent meaning. Claude Levi-Strauss's work on myths and their cultural meaning exemplifies paradigmatic analysis.

In their work *Reading Television*, Fiske and Hartley (1978) discussed three orders of signification that semiotic analysis may assess, particularly in a paradigmatic analysis. First, a sign "stands for" something, as a word such as "car" indicates a large metal machine. Second, the sign has a range of connoted cultural meanings, such as "freedom" or "machismo." Third, signs work collectively to create a worldview, such as a car being part of a system of signs that a culture is becoming increasingly industrial or materialist (Fiske and Hartley, 1978). For Fiske and Harley (1978), this third order of signification brought up the notion of intersubjectivity. They wrote, "this is the area of 'subjective' responses which are shared, to a degree, by members of a culture" (p. 46). They go on to say that "this intersubjectivity is culturally determined, and is one of the ways in which cultural influences affect the individuals in any culture, and through which cultural membership is expressed" (p. 46).

For Berger (1982), two key elements of semiological analysis included metaphor and metonymy.[7] Metaphor implies a relationship or similarity between two things, even if the relationship is not patently obvious (e.g. love is like a runaway train). Metonymy, on the other hand, uses an object or symbol to stand for another object or idea (e.g. wings and halos stand for angelic presence). When people watch films or television programs, they utilize cultural codes to process metaphors and metonyms, often unconsciously. For example, we are not always conscious of the use of color, such as in characters' costumes, but we have become culturally predisposed to perceive white as good and black as bad, as in the color of cowboy hats of protagonists and villains in western films and television shows. Of course, these codes are fluid, changing and subject to individual interpretation. For example, in some cultures, white symbolizes death and even in western culture, black has taken on an air of elegance or sophistication, not necessarily evil. Thus, the producers of cultural artifacts may have a particular code or set of codes in mind, while the consumers may use an entirely different set of codes in their consumption.

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[7] These concepts also have importance in the writings of other scholars discussed in this chapter, such as Lacan, Jameson, and Baudrillard.

Fiske and Hartley (1978) noted, however, that when a convention becomes overused, it loses its effectiveness as it becomes a cliché (p. 63). They noted that "Television, a highly conventional medium, constantly uses signs that teeter on the brink of cliches" (p. 63). In addition to the rather physical signs present in texts such as films and television shows, the structures of the texts themselves have embedded codes. The position of the camera can signify something (e.g. a close-up shot can signal intimacy as can editing techniques (e.g. fade-in and fade-out symbolize beginning and ending) (Berger, 1982). Add in elements such as lighting, sound, and music, and the programs become complex, multi-layered systems of codes. Although various texts (films, collectibles, websites) do offer different generic signifiers, they remain nonetheless similar in their use of conventionalized codes (Fiske and Hartley, 1978).

To return to the linguistic origins of semiotics, *parole* is the individual speech act, while *langue* is the rules that govern the way meaning becomes produced through the use of language. Barthes infused his semiotic definitions with the ideologically charged notions of denotation and connotation. In the classic example of an image of a black soldier saluting a flag on the cover of *Paris-Match*, the denoted meanings "black" and "soldier" are overlaid with ideological connoted meaning such as "French Imperialism."

Finally, the overarching reality claims made by texts, particularly in this case study about angels, serve as an important element in semiotic analysis. Hodge and Kress (1988) wrote, "modality refers to the status, authority, and reliability of a message to its ontological status, or to its value as truth or fact" (p. 124). Chandler (1999) suggested that the Saussurian notion of modality offers that reality exists only in the sign, not outside of the sign. He noted that this Saussurian conception meshes with an idealist view of reality, wherein reality is purely subjective, while it clashes with a realist view that conceives of reality as existing independent of the subject. Chandler (1999) suggested that the middle ground constructivist view, which adopts the notion "that language and other media play a major part in the 'social construction of reality,'" would find the Saussurian view of modality a bit extreme. Rather, a constructivist view embraces the notion that some representations of reality are more reliable than others. It would seem that film makers and television producers would adopt this view, as their work rests on their desire to predispose, though not entirely prescribe, certain audience reactions through particular combinations of lighting, music, camera shots, etc.

Evaluation and Limitations of Semiotics

As the preceding discussion of the origins and key terms of semiotics indicates, the real strength of semiotics rests in its ability to go beyond surface meaning (the result of traditional content analysis) to attempt to understand the wider socio-cultural significance of a text or an element (sign) within the text. Scholars can apply semiological analysis to assess virtually any cultural artifact, from film and television programs to malls and amusement parks. Thus, it provides the continuity I seek in the three areas of empirical research used in this project: television and film, collectibles, and websites. The only criteria is that semiology studies systems of signs, as the signs are symbolic in and of themselves and in relation to other signs (Berger, 1982).

Like any theory, however, semiotics has certain criticisms leveled against it, in addition to these strengths, and I accept these limitations in the context of this project and work to minimize their effects when possible. While Hodge and Kress (1988) wrote that through the application of semiotic approaches, "everything in a culture can be seen as a form of communication, organized in ways akin to verbal language, to be understood in terms of a common set of fundamental rules or principles," (p. 1) they also recognize that the field of semiotics as such does lack a solid, unifying foundation. I agree with

Chandler's (1999) criticism of the field of semiotics as a whole because, first, semioticians often fail to clearly explicate their techniques and the limitations of these techniques, and second, they lack any articulated agreement about the scope and methodology employed in the field. He wrote that "in the worst forms of critical practice, what passes for 'semiotic analysis' is little more than a pretentious form of literary criticism based merely on subjective interpretation and grand assertions" (p. 1). I have found this true in my search for models of study and methodological instructions on which to model my own work.

As well, traditional (structural) semiotics is often criticized for its lack of attention to the social context of the signifying systems it studies, such as the ideologically charged nature of the production and consumption of these sign systems (Hodge and Kress, 1988). Hodge and Kress (1988) sought to develop semiotics with consideration of these contextualizing features in their aptly titled work *Social Semiotics*. They noted, for example, the Marxist notion that in capitalist societies, dominant groups wield money, power, and therefore control over societal structures such as religion and the media that play a central role in the production and distribution of sign-systems. They identified the "logonomic systems," or rules governing production and consumption of signs, and genre as two of the contextualizing features that should be examined in order to understand discourse. Discourse, they wrote, serves as "the site where social forms of organization engage with systems of signs in the production of texts, thus reproducing or changing the sets of meanings and values which make up a culture" (p. 6). For these reasons, I make use of social semiotics techniques in this project.

In addition to these overarching methodological concerns, Jensen and Jankowski (1991) noted that a key shortcoming in textual analysis in general lies in subjective interpretations of the researcher and the potential lack of validity in the interpretations when studies are repeated. Instead, they declared that "the validity of an interpretation depends on a more universal confidence in the scholar's expertise and sensitivity, his/her legitimacy and authority, or perhaps an appreciation of the interpretation as original and stimulating" (p. 32). In a related criticism of sorts, Chandler (1999) suggested that semiotics lacks commensurability with quantification. This criticism, while apparently absurd, provides more a guideline for when to use semiotics rather than an insistence against its use. Instead, he suggested that "the empirical testing of semiotic claims requires other methods" (p. 1). Alongside of this assertion rests the criticism that semiotic analysis often does not include empirical support for its claims, selecting examples that fit the researcher's subjective interpretation of the text rather than a more systematized analysis of a sample. Strinati (1995) believed that structuralism and semiotics lack empirical testing, and that the instances cited as support can be purely anecdotal and subject to individual interpretation. Chandler (1999) quoted Solomon (1988) in the argument that the defining characteristics of semiotics "prevent it from being a science—that is, something with universal validity" (p. 232).

Further, semiotic analysis does not allow for the focus on how readers interpret texts that methods such as ethnography and observation allow (Chandler, 1999, p. 1). Strinati (1995) saw that it fails to truly address concerns of consumers, as it focuses entirely on the researcher, the "preferred reader." As Berger (1982) noted, semiotics virtually ignores aesthetics, with the interpretation becoming more important than the text itself.

Berger (1984) acknowledged that semiotics can be a personal, perhaps idiosyncratic, method of inquiry. Nonetheless, he emphasized that hypothesizing about signs, such as material culture objects, allow us to explore the meaning of people's everyday lives. Sometimes material culture reveals information that people aren't even aware of about their own identity, or information they may be unwilling to share verbally. There remain, of course, problems in interpreting signs, as Berger (1984) suggests, such as:

- the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified
- competing signs resulting in clutter
- confusion about codes between creator and consumer
- change in meaning
- ambiguous nature of signs

Despite these drawbacks, social semiotics provides the best, though imperfect, way of unpacking the meaning of signs across a variety of texts and theories. I have attempted, however, to take these weaknesses into consideration in my research. The following section outlines the specific questions I used to guide the research process.

Techniques for Semiotic Analysis

To determine the specific methods I use for this project, I called upon two sets of guidelines for semiotic analysis: one from Arthur Asa Berger (1982), a Professor of Broadcast Communication Arts at San Francisco State University, and one from Daniel Chandler, a media researcher and lecturer in media theory at the University of Wales, Aberstwyth. While they use slightly different approaches to semiotic research, I made use of them both in this project to address a wide spectrum of the potential issues at work in this project. (The full lists of questions used by Berger and Chandler appear in Appendix A.)

In comparing Berger's and Chandler's approaches, I distilled nine key areas of inquiry for the empirical research for this project, although not all areas applied to all three elements of the research project. Table 1 below lists these issues specifically.

TABLE 1:

SEMIOTIC ISSUES FOR EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

- Who created the sign/product, and how does the producer's influence impact the intended reading?
- What effects do the socio-historical context, the medium, and the genre (including originality) have on the product?
- Why was this product selected?
- What are the key signifiers and signifieds in the text?
- What is the central opposition in the text?
- How does the syntagmic arrangement affect the text (e.g. formulas)?
- What are the important features of the medium that surface in the text (e.g. camera angle, materials used in a collectible, sophistication of a website)?
- What reality claims are made in the text?
- What are possible interpretations of the sign by the consumer?

Sources: Berger (1982) and Chandler (1999). See Appendix A.

Conclusion

In the preface to Van Der Hart's (1972) *The Theology of Angels and Devils*, Edward Yarnold wrote, "[p]aradoxically, one of the least important questions in the theology of Angels and Devils is whether they are existing persons or simply symbols. The important thing is to know *what* they represent" (preface). This notion firmly underpins my approach to the subject of angels, and this approach shapes and informs the theoretical and methodological issues discussed in this chapter.

My choice of Berger and Luckmann's (1966) social construction of reality as the guiding theory for this study reflects my focus on the reality of angels that occurs through social interaction and social institutions such as the media. Berger's (1969; 1977) orientation to contemporary religion as a civil religion, in the stream of Bellah, demonstrates the importance of angels as a cross-religious and human symbol. Berger, Luckmann, Lyons, and other scholars have noted the trend of secularization in contemporary society, which has resulted not in the absence of religion and spirituality, but altered forms. As well, poststructuralist and postmodern approaches to religion and culture emphasize the consumer-oriented nature of religion, which reflects in the consumption of angel-related cultural products. The methodological choices I made to investigate angels in contemporary cultural products intertwine closely with these theoretical musings. In keeping with the constructivist approach, I chose social semiotics to examine the construction and consumption of the symbolic images of these cultural products. This contextual mode of examining this subject matter allows for the understanding of the commercial nature of cultural products, ranging from media texts to figurines. While these angels may be "entertaining," they are moneymaking just the same.

CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL ANGELS:
A REVIEW OF LITERATURE & CULTURAL ARTIFACTS

Introduction

The presence of angels on our televisions, in our movie theatres, on our *Time* Magazine, and in our shopping malls supports the contention that in contemporary North American society "angels are among us." To understand this recent surge in popularity, however, requires a deeper look at the history of North American culture and how and why angels have taken on such important roles in the millennium context. By bringing together a wide variety of sources to discuss the ways angels have been perceived historically, this literature review presents an overview of various times and places where angels have enjoyed particular popularity or disfavor.[8] This historical information will then serve as the backdrop for the research on angels in contemporary culture, to explain continuities and changes that images of angels have experienced. As I will demonstrate, angel imagery has remained a pervasive element in Western literature and cultural artifacts for over two millennia, although this imagery has changed in various socio-historical contexts.

First, this chapter uses examples from historical writings (e.g. the Bible as well as additional Biblical texts) as well as cultural expressions (e.g. painting and literature) to explain how angels have been portrayed throughout various historical periods over the last two millennia.[9] While using such a diverse array of sources does become problematic, these sources provide information about angels not readily available in more traditional academic sources. As well, these cultural sources link up with the cultural artifacts discussed in the empirical research, presented in later chapters. When possible, I used contemporary commentary on angels throughout history to affirm the assertions based on these historical writings and cultural expressions. The chapter ends with a discussion of contemporary works on angels, both academic and popular.

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[8] Much of the information presented in this chapter originated in a series of papers written for a directed study with Dr. Stephen Kent in Winter 1997, although the chapter here condenses much of that work in the interest of brevity.

[9] The high number of scriptural, literary, and artistic examples of angels necessitate distilling out representative examples, rather than a comprehensive inventory of all angelic imagery over the past two millennia, if such a thing were even possible. Rather, this chapter aims to provide a brief tracking of how Western culture has constructed angelic images throughout various socio-historical periods, and how these images have reflected the societal issues of the time and place as well as cultural orientations toward religion and secularization. Thus, the trends suggested in this chapter will receive support from occasional scriptural quotes and reproductions of paintings. In some instances, Biblical passages have been summarized or paraphrased, with the chapter and verse cited afterwards for reference. Similarly, a painting may be verbally described or named, though its visual support not included in the text of this dissertation. In order to discuss as many examples as possible in the briefest space, this chapter discusses the thematic content of these cultural artifacts, rather than employing a more detailed semiotic analysis.

Angels in the Jewish Tradition

In order to characterize accurately the angels that have become a part of North American culture through its Jewish, and later, Christian, roots, it is necessary to look at both traditional texts (e.g. the Bible[10]) and other texts outside the traditional religious canon (e.g. the Dead Sea Scrolls texts).[11] As I will demonstrate, the editors of the Bible were mindful of the images of angels discussed in the scriptures, so the images intentionally left out of the Bible tell a great deal about angel belief at the time, perhaps more than the images contained in the Bible.

As a first step in the journey to discovering the part angels have played in the development of North American culture, the following section begins to explore the role of angels in various texts of the Jewish tradition. It begins with the Hebrew Bible and continues on to discuss the Dead Sea Scrolls and related texts, as well as the Talmud.

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[10] For the Biblical references in this dissertation, I used a contemporary King James Version of the Bible. As a Protestant, I am most familiar with this version. Other versions of the Bible, such as the Roman Catholic Bible, the Orthodox Bible, and the King James Version published in 1611, include additional scriptures (deuterocanaonical to Catholics, apocryphal to Protestants) discussed in the section of this dissertation devoted to the "Additional Biblical Texts" (Electronic Text Center, 2001).

[11] For example, Davidson (1967) noted angels that appear in the New and Old Testaments of the Bible are usually not named, and one must access other sources in order to ascertain the full identity of the angels. He quoted Revelations 8:2 "And I saw the seven angels who stand before God; and to them were given seven trumpets." While the passage explains (reasonably) clearly that there are seven angels, the identity of these angels is not clear. To further explicate this example, Davidson discussed their possible identities. Davidson (1967) sought to identify these seven unnamed angels, initially naming only three: Michael and Gabriel, named in other sections the Bible, and Raphael, named in the apocryphal Book of Tobit. In his quest to identify positively the four remaining angels, Davidson expanded his search to include works ranging from Milton's Paradise Lost to the pseudepigrapha, especially the Book of Enoch. In these works,

Angels in the Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew Bible consists of twenty-four chapters (also the first twenty-four chapters in the Old Testament used by Christians) that date back to 1250 B.C.E. to 200 B.C.E. (Margolies, 1994). Angels appear frequently throughout these books of the Bible, in a number of different forms and contexts.[12] The Old Testament provides a number of physical descriptions of angels, descriptions of angels' roles, and narrations of angels interacting with both believers and nonbelievers. In general, Margolies (1994) asserted that angels, both good and bad, appear in the Bible because of the need to bridge the mortal world with the divine world.

Although limited, the physical descriptions of angels that appear in the Old (and New) Testament influence angelic imagery throughout the ages. Angels take different physical forms, including the traditional winged creature:

> Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. (Isaiah 6:2)

In the Old Testament scriptures, the description of angels often mentions or resembles stars (Psalms 148:2-5) or heaven (Isaiah 44.23). In addition to their celestial embodiments, angels often take on the appearance of mortals, as Abraham found when he encountered three men who turned out to be angels (Genesis 18:2-3).

Beyond these physical descriptions, the Old Testament also provides descriptions of angels' activities, demeanour, and "personalities."[13] For example, angels play a central role in Judgment Day (II Samuel 14:17; Revelations). Angels also possess great strength, enabling them to do God's will (Psalms 103:20). In Genesis, the first reference to fallen angels occurs, though the reference is quite vague:

> When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years." The Nephilim were on the earth in those days--and also afterward--when the sons

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he found candidates for the remaining four: Uriel, Raguel, Saraqael, and Remiel. Thus, his search involved an initial reference in the Bible, augmented with additional searches in other religious and secular works.

[12] The categories discusssed in this dissertation emerged from the categories used in several Bible concordances.

[13] Or would one say "angelalities?"

> of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown. (Genesis 6:1-4)

The Book of Enoch, discussed later, draws this reference more finely.

One of the more significant roles for angels, specifically cherubim, involves serving as guards. The cherubim, of Assyrian origin, have the first appearance in the Bible:

> So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life. (Genesis 3:24)

These angels serve as guards for the Lord to ward off the evil of man, and as guards of religious faith. The cherubim also adorned temples in significant ways:

> In the Most Holy Place he made a pair of sculptured cherubim and overlaid them with gold. The total wingspan of the cherubim was twenty cubits. One wing of the first cherub was five cubits long and touched the temple wall, while its other wing, also five cubits long, touched the wing of the other cherub. Similarly one wing of the second cherub was five cubits long and touched the other temple wall, and its other wing, also five cubits long, touched the wing of the first cherub. The wings of these cherubim extended twenty cubits. They stood on their feet, facing the main hall. He made the curtain of blue, purple and crimson yarn and fine linen, with cherubim worked into it. (II Chron 3:10-17)

Other angels serve as aural decoration, as they appear frequently to praise God in song (Isaiah 44:23).

In addition to these cherubim, unnamed angels appear frequently in the Bible as guardians of believers:

> See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him. If you listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you. My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. (Exodus 23.30-23)

To paint more colorful pictures of angels, the Hebrew Bible contains several instances of angels appearing to specific people to bring messages from God, to praise God, to guard believers, and to encourage obedience and to minister justice. Margolies (1994) noted that usually in the Hebrew Bible, the angels who appeared have no name. Rather, they served as nameless supporters to God, mainly messengers, so they would not detract from His power with personalities of their own.

In the Old Testament, angels appear most often to give specific messages, such as to announce the birth of children. In Genesis, for example, angels appear to Hagar, the maid of the long barren Sarah (wife of Abraham). These angels appear first when Hagar is pregnant with Abraham's child, after Sarah has turned her out, and the angels bring a message to Hagar about what the future holds (Genesis 16:7-11). Later, an angel appears to Hagar when she and her infant son face death during their exile in the desert, after they have once again lost favor with Sarah, and the angel brings word that God will protect Hagar and her son. As well, an angel appears to Manoah's wife, then later to Manoah and his wife, to tell them they will have a child, who becomes Samson of popular Biblical fame. (Judges 13:1-5). As Margolies (1994) comments, these appearances feature angels who do not act directly on behalf of God, but instead bring messages from God to inspire people to use their own self-reliance.

Later in Genesis, after Hagar's exile, Abraham's wife, the 90-year old Sarah, has a child of her own called Isaac. God tests Abraham by telling him to sacrifice this child, and when Abraham does so, an angel appears as a saviour for the child (Genesis 22:9-12). Angels also appear as messengers from God to guide Jacob during his "crisis of faith." Their first appearance comes in a dream, to tell him that his trials and tribulations all help in his service to the Lord (Genesis 28:10-14).

A number of angel appearances call people to service of the Lord, especially in the context of leading the chosen people on the path of righteousness. When Abraham prepares to pass his legacy on, God tells him He will provide an angel to look out for Abraham (Genesis 24:7). In another situation, perhaps one of the most well-known in the Bible, these messenger angels in the Old Testament appears to Moses, from a burning bush:

> Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb. And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the

> bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. (Exodus 3:1-4)

Once again, this angel announced the appearance of God, though God delivers the message that Moses will lead his people. As well, after Moses dies, an angel appears to charge Joshua with the responsibility for leading the Israelites (Joshua 5:13-15). Similarly, an angel appears to Gideon encourage him to deliver his people from evil (Judges 6:11-14).

The angels mentioned thus far have served mainly as messengers, and they interacted little with the people to whom they brought messages. Many angels in the Hebrew Bible, however, interacted more with the people they contact. For example, an angel first appears to Jacob to give him a message about the tests of faith he must endure. (Genesis 31:11-13; Genesis 32:1). Later, an angel appears in a physical manifestation to wrestle with Jacob (Genesis 32:25-30). Although the angel has no name in the Bible, Margolies (1994) calls him Gabriel. In this appearance, the angel (Gabriel) brings a message, but he delivers the message after engaging Jacob in a test of his faith. Thus, the angel takes on a more active and distinct personality than those mentioned earlier.

Another active angel in the Bible appears to Balaam, a sort of "witch doctor" (Margolies, 1994, p. 35). This angel appears as Balaam rides on his ass, and the angel speaks in the disguise of the ass and functions to convince Balaam to embrace God (Numbers 22:22-36). This angel takes an active role in bringing the word of God to Balaam. The angel's physical presence impacts first the ass, then Balaam, prompting Balaam to realize his lack of faith. Also, the angel's disguise as the ass exemplifies another incarnation (perhaps uncomplimentary) that angels may take in their dealings with humans.

In an even more active role, in Daniel, an angel appears when King Nebuchadnezzar tries to burn three Jewish men (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) to death for refusing to worship a false idol (Daniel 3:26-29). In these verses, we see an angel who has a physical manifestation and takes an active and specific role in spreading the word of God. The appearance of the angel has a clear impact in the conversion of Nebuchadnezzar, and thus demonstrates a tendency for angels to have more tangible relationships with the people they encounter. Later in the book of Daniel, another "active" angel appears in the fabled lion's den to save Daniel from death (Daniel 6:19-22). As before, the angel takes action in these verses, and this action saves Daniel from the lions.

Daniel also sees angels that portend of the end times, of particular concern during this time of Jewish persecution:

> [W]hile I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, "Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. (Daniel 9:21-22)
>
> At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people--everyone whose name is found written in the book--will be delivered. (Daniel 12:1)

This connection between angels and the apocalypse appears in other scriptures discussed later in this chapter, such as Revelations and the additional Biblical text Enoch.

Clearly, the Hebrew Bible illustrates the important role angels take in making the word of God visible to man. They act as (generally unnamed) messengers and guardians in supernatural, human and animal form, and they also walk beside man to do the work of God. The Hebrew Bible alone, however, does not provide a full picture of the tradition of angels in Judeo-Christian writing and, by extension, Judeo-Christian life. Taking other texts into consideration broadens the scope of this study, and in doing so clarifies how angels have influenced the course of our culture.

Additional Biblical Texts

Beyond the previously mentioned books of the Old Testament exists a set of texts written in the intertestament time frame of the 2nd century B.C.E. to the 2nd century C.E. (Margolies, 1994). These works, often attributed pseudonymously to historical figures and authorities, include apocalyptic writings, histories, psalms, and wisdom literature

(Vawter, 2001b). These texts did not, however, get included in most Bibles of the Jewish and, later, Protestant faiths, perhaps because of the apocalyptic content that Biblical editors felt would incite hysteria (Margolies, 1994, p. 77). As well, some of these texts feature angels prominently, which the Jewish Rabbis may have felt usurped the power of God (Margolies, 1994, p. 77).

The Roman Catholic and Orthodox Bibles do include a number of these texts: Judith, the Wisdom of Solomon, Tobit, Sirach (or Ecclesiasticus), Baruch, First and Second Maccabees, various additions to the Book of Esther (10:4-10), and the Book of Daniel (3:24-90;13;14) (Electronic Text Center, 2001). In addition to these texts that Catholics call "deuterocanonical" (meaning "second canon"), a number of texts with similar origins exist that the Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic religions all generally consider "extracanonical," such as the Book of Jubilees and the Book of Enoch (Vawter, 2001a).

The language used to refer to these texts does confuse the issue somewhat, and the linguistic differentiation reflects the historical traditions that have shaped the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. Protestants typically refer to the Catholic deuterocanonical texts as "apocrypha," using the term "pseudepigrapha" to refer to the "extracanonical" texts previously mentioned. Catholics, however, use the term "apocrypha" to refer just to these "extracanonical" texts. The terminology came into use in the fifth century when St. Jerome (a biblical scholar) first used the term "apocrypha" (meaning hidden) to refer to the books included in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, but not in the Hebrew Bible (Vawter, 2001a). Most of these texts from the Septuagint, as well as a selection of other texts, remain part of the Catholic canon (or deuterocanon) today. During the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther agreed that, while the apocryphal texts could be useful for historical purposes, they should not be a part of Protestant doctrine (Collins, 2001). The term "pseudepigrapha" has come into use outside the Catholic tradition to allude to the perception of the false authorship of the extracanonical texts.

In addition to these "apocryphal," "deuterocanonical," or "pseudepigraphal" texts, the Dead Sea Scrolls include a number of recently discovered texts that originated most likely with the Essenes (an ascetic group in that area c. 200 B.C.E.), though a young shepherd found the scrolls in just 1947 (Margolies, 1994). These texts include previously undiscovered Hebrew and Aramaic translations of existing Biblical and extracanonical texts, as well as other undiscovered apocryphal or pseudepigraphal texts (Gaster, 2001). Some of the Dead Sea Scrolls texts involve an apocalyptic "show-down" between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness, showing that the Essenes believed angels played a prominent role in religious tradition. According to Margolies (1994), these writings say that people have within themselves an Angel of Light and an Angel of Darkness, and all people face the challenge of keeping these two angels in balance.

As the previous paragraphs have illustrated, different religious traditions have perceived and used these texts differently over the course of the last two millennia. Some texts have enjoyed regular and legitimate use in some religious traditions since the Common Era, while others have remained out of circulation in some traditions or even entirely until the twentieth century. For the purpose of this literature review on the subject of angels, I call these texts "additional Biblical texts," and I treat them here collectively.[14]

To begin, the discussion of angels in many of the additional Biblical texts involves fairly simple description, or reference to their roles as God's messengers and assistants during judgment day (II Esedras; Tobit 8: 15).[15] A more unique discussion of angels in the books of Esdras and Wisdom discusses a baser need of angels, though in the context of mortal needs:

> Then had I pity upon your mournings, and gave you manna to eat; so ye did eat angels' bread. Instead whereof thou feddest thine own people with angels' food, and didst send them from heaven bread prepared without their labour, able to content every man's delight, and agreeing to every taste. (Wisdom 16:20)

Still, the majority of the angels discussed in these additional Biblical texts exhibit a rather generic quality; they have neither names nor specific interactions with individual people. The texts do, however, give at least one specific mention of a particular angel:

I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels, which present the prayers of the

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[14] In using the term "additional Biblical texts," as I mentioned earlier, I recognize that some of these texts remain part of the Catholic canon and would be properly considered Biblical texts—not additional texts—alongside the books of the Old and New Testaments.

[15] These scriptural quotations were taken from Williams (1995).

> saints, and which go in and out before the glory of the Holy One. (Tobit 12: 15)

Though many of the angels in the additional Biblical texts may lack clearly defined personalities, the Book of Enoch give a great deal of detail about the angels. Margolies (1994) suggested that the presence of angels in this text allowed for a crucial bridge between the human and divine world, as the Jewish people at the time needed a more tangible assurance of the God that allowed unspeakable horrors to befall them. Margolies (1994) noted that the plethora of angels noted in these works, each with a distinct identity smacks of pagan polytheism.

Owing to the lack of attention paid to texts such as Enoch for most of the Common Era, the true authorship of these texts often remains a mystery. The name attributed to the work, such as Enoch, reflects less the author's true identity and more the desire to give the words the respectability of a Biblical figure, as the actual writers of the texts likely feared repercussions if they attached their own names to their work (Tse, 2000). Similarly, a cloud of uncertainty surrounds the linguistic origins of the scriptures of Enoch, the additional Biblical text with the most significant presence of angels. The existing complete copies of the book indicate the author wrote it in the ancient Ethiopic language, though fragments discovered in the Qumran caves indicate that the authors of all or part of the book wrote in Aramaic. These Aramaic origins provide a sense of romanticism regarding the subject of angels; as Bloom (1996) noted, "Aramaic, by some traditions, is the language of the angels, which make it appropriate that I Enoch should have been composed in that tongue" (p. 42).

Regardless of its authorship and linguistic origins, the Book of Enoch provides one of the most comprehensive treatments of angels in the Judeo-Christian religious texts. In this book, Enoch tells the story of his journey to heaven and his transformation into the angel Metatron. His journeys also lead him to encounter angels, both righteous and fallen, as he experiences the celestial world, and these encounters include the introduction of the "angelic inner circle" or the archangels. Three issues of specific relevance that arise from Enoch include the carving out of identity for the archangels, the detailed descriptions of angels' roles in Judgment, and an expanded discussion of the fallen angels.

Although Enoch mentions a large number of angels throughout his journey into heaven, he gives the most specific attention to the archangels Michael, Uriel, Raphael, and Gabriel. Each of these angels develops into a distinct entity as the chapters of Enoch unfold. In the Book of Enoch, as with other scriptures, Michael serves as the leader of the inner circle of archangels.[16] Raphael serves as a "healing angel," who uses the medicine of love to assuage the pain of the righteous (Margolies, 1994). Gabriel embodies the virtue of courage as he commands Enoch to be brave during his meeting with God. As well, Uriel receives occasional mention in Enoch (Margolies, 1994). Unlike most discussions of angels in the Hebrew Bible, Enoch names the angels he encounters in his journey (Enoch 20:1-8). The naming of these angels and special emphasis on the archangels shows what a prominent place they will have in the Book of Enoch.

During most of the book of Enoch, the archangels give him a "tour." At one point, he sees a vision of the heaven and earth, and he also sees an abyss of neither heaven nor earth. He inquires about this of Uriel, and Uriel tells him the fallen angels will be exiled there after Judgement day (Enoch 19:1-3). Uriel also shows Enoch the celestial and astronomical order of the sun, moon, stars, and wind, all under the control of angels and ultimately of God. The archangels Raphael and Michael also tell Enoch about judgment, and Raphael shows him the place where people will wait their judgment (Enoch 22:3-4). Enoch also encounters the angels of punishment preparing the instruments of Satan (Enoch 53:3-6). Later, the text presents two dream visions about the apocalypse. Enoch also discusses Biblical history and judgment, in which the archangels take a prominent role. After the judgment, the angels will provide support for these righteous ones and help communicate their righteousness to God (Enoch 100:5; Enoch 104:1-2).

According to Enoch, at Judgment Day, the fallen angels will receive their punishment. Enoch expands of Genesis 6, chronicling how angels descended from heaven and engaged in sexual relations with women. Enoch later details the fate of these fallen angels after he enters heaven and undergoes a transformation into the angel

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[16] In 3 Baruch, for example, Michael holds the keys to heaven (Margolies, 1994).

Metatron. These chapters try to answer the question of why God sent such a destructive flood to deal with those who fell from grace. Vander Kam (1997) also comments that the role of this flood and first apocalypse precurses the final apocalypse on Judgment Day.

Enoch explains the special role of the fallen angels, giving them names as well as discussing the ways they interacted with the Sons of Man:

> And Azazel taught men to make swords, and knives, and shields, and breastplates, and made known to them the metals of the earth and the art of working them, and bracelets, and ornaments, and the use of antimony, and the beautifying of the eyelids, and all kinds of costly stones, and all coloring tinctures. And there arose much godlessness, and they committed fornication, and they were led astray, and became corrupt in all their ways. Semjaza taught enchantments, and root-cuttings, 'Armaros the resolving of enchantments, Baraqijal (taught) astrology, Kokabel the constellations, Ezeqeel the knowledge of the clouds, Araqiel the signs of the earth, Shamsiel the signs of the sun, and Sariel the course of the moon. And as men perished, they cried, and their cry went up to heaven. (Chapter 8)

Like the character of angels changes from the Hebrew Bible to the Book of Enoch, so does the role of the chief "fallen angel," Satan. In the Hebrew Bible, Satan serves as "a law-abiding citizen of the Angelic Host, an agent of God who goes about doing his job as faithfully as he knows how" (Margolies, 1994, p. 102). This casts him in the role of an agent who does God's will to test His people. For example, he tests the faith of Job at the behest of God. In Enoch and other additional Biblical texts, however, Satan and his disciples act more of their own volition, shown in particular when the angels decide to indulge in terrestrial intercourse despite God's specific proviso against this behavior. Margolies (1994) pointed out that the Judaism does not construct Satan as an adversary of God, as Christianity does, but instead as merely one of the angels under God. This agentry of Satan, as Margolies (1994) noted, probably affected the Rabbis' decision to omit certain texts from the Bible. As well, the lengthy discussion Enoch provides of the fallen angels may give undue focus to Satan and his disciples.

According to Margolies (1994), the fallen angels introduced corruption and evil into the human condition. In the book The Life of Adam and Eve, Satan is cast out of heaven for refusing to bow down to Adam, as any angel of God ought to. Nonetheless, after Adam and Eve's fall from grace, God gave power over humans over to the Angel of

Death, who no person can overcome (Margolies, 1994, p. 114. The archangels protested to God, however, over the death of Moses, so God came to earth with the archangels in order to administrate his death (Margolies, 1994, p. 118). The Angel of Death does not figure into the Hebrew Bible, but begins to filter in to Jewish writing in the years just before and after the advent of Christianity (p. 119). According to Margolies (1994), man, not angels, needed the proscriptions of the Torah, as man alone succumbs to the temptation of sin and evil. Thus, Judaism constructs Satan as an adversary of humans, not God (p. 123).

Taken collectively, the additional Biblical texts feature angels in a variety of ways, from superficially to centrally. Clearly, the Book of Enoch features angels in very active roles, including the archangels, the fallen angels, and the depiction of Enoch himself. Thus, the angels develop individual characteristics, they bring messages from God, and they perform acts that test the righteous. Still, the angels act at all times under the aegis of God, despite their personal loci of control. Owing to the positioning of these additional texts as secondary to or outside of the Biblical canon, they may have had less presence within the Judeo-Christian tradition than other Biblical texts, yet the presence of angels in texts such as the Book of Enoch renders them important for this study.

Angels in Judaism beyond the Scriptures

In addition to the Old Testament and the additional Biblical texts, angels have figured into the Jewish tradition in other contexts. The Talmud (a code of Jewish Law) mentions angels occasionally, as do some Jewish prayer texts (Machzor and Siddur), as well as the Kabbalah.

The Talmud brings together a collection of Jewish law developed over the first five centuries of the common era by Jewish scholars (Margolies, 1994). At that time, the monotheistic Jewish tradition founded by Moses struggled against paganism in general and Roman polytheism in particular (Margolies, 1994). As well, Jews had to contend with Christianity, positing that the Christian trinity erodes the singular, monotheistic power of God (Margolies, 1994). The Talmudic Rabbis sought to repair this erosion, and part of this repair came in the form of "dethroning" angels, as the Rabbis believed angels smacked of polytheistic idolotry (Margolies, 1994). The Rabbinic writings attempted to return angels to their perceived proper place as nameless agents who do the will of God, solely at God's command (Margolies, 1994). Margolies (1994) contended that the Talmudic Rabbis used angels in their writings sometimes as a means to "argue" with God about issues that they, the Rabbis, would have liked to argue about.

Also, angels do appear in at least one a key role in the Talmud, when the archangel Gabriel saves Abraham from Nimrod. Despite this important angelic presence, Margolies (1994) asserted that "cutting angels down to size was one of the important tasks the Rabbis of the Talmud set for themselves" (p. 135). The Talmud thus chiefly uses generic angels as a metaphor for everyday righteous behavior for Jews (as compared to the more specific angel encounters discussed in the Old Testament and the characterization of angels as individual entities in the additional Biblical texts previously discussed). For example, a good angel and a bad angel come to Jewish homes from the synagogue after services each Sabbath (Margolies, 1994). If the house shows order, the good angel prevails, while the bad angel prevails if the house lacks order.[17] In helping keep order and peace in the house, the good angels once again supersede the bad angels. Thus, angels get billing in the Sabbath prayer Shalom Aleichem delineated in the Talmud: "Welcome and peace to you, angels of peace. Bless me with peace, you angels of peace--peace as the gift of the King who is the King of Kings, the holy One, blessed be he" (Margolies, 1994, p. 147). Margolies (1994) asserted that through discussions such as this, the Talmudic Rabbis simultaneously distanced angels from God while bringing angels, and thus faith, closer to the human realm (p. 148).

Thus, while the Rabbis may have attempted to quash the level of importance of angels in Jewish life and scripture, they did not seek to completely eliminate their presence. Instead, they seem to support the notion that angels, kept in their place, serve as part of the foundation of a holy Jewish life. This "place," though, suggests that angels should remain anonymous and vague as they work as extensions of God's will, without clear agendas of their own.

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[17] Note that the angels accompany the *men* home from the synagogue, and while the men were at the synagogue, *women* were charged with preparing the Sabbath meal, providing order in the house, and caring for children. The women, then, were ultimately responsible for the presence of the good or bad angel, while men were quite simply the conduit by which the angels entered the home.

In addition to the Talmudic scriptures, some of the key prayer works in the Jewish tradition, including the Siddhur and Machzor, written between 1 C.E. and 500 C.E., featured angels (Margolies, 1994). Margolies (1994) wrote that the Siddhur establishes that both humans and angels must properly address their prayers to God. He continued on to note that the Zohar, mystic Jewish texts that feature angels prominently, also emphasizes the notion that God, not angels, should receive prayers. Some prayers nonetheless ask God to have the angels bless people (Margolies, 1994).

Similar to the Zohar, the Kabbalah, a set of Jewish texts with a mystic theme, revolves around questions of God and creation (Margolies, 1994, p. 176). Although the Talmudic Rabbis discouraged this type of inquiry, the Zohar emerged in the late 13th century as a text that brought to light these questions, thus bringing the divine closer to humanity (Margolies, 1994, p. 179). As Margolies (1994) noted, Jewish mystics who embraced the Kabbalistic tradition frequently had angels appear, especially in their dreams (p. 179). Despite some recent revivals of Kabbalism (for example, Madonna's explorations as evidenced in her *Frozen* video), Margolies (1994) argued that the rise and fall of the false messiah Sabbetai Zvi in Turkey in the seventeenth century evidenced the climax and denouement of Jewish mysticism and the "age of demons" (p. 183).

In the Age of Enlightenment, people focused on scientific rationalism and began to question non-rational thought, such as belief in God and certainly belief in angels and demons. During this time, two movements emerged in the Jewish tradition: Haskalah (enlightenment) and Hasidism, which embraced tradition. In Hasidism, angels emerge from the activities of men, so good deed elicited good angels while wrongdoing created bad angels. The angels created by our wrong doings can be "undone' through penitence and good deeds (Margolies, 1994, p. 191). Hasidism, a highly traditional strain of Judaism, embraces the notion that people are always in the company of angels.

Overall, the essential differences in the depiction of angels between the "sanctioned" Jewish scriptures, such as the Old Testament and the Talmud, and the "renegade" Jewish scriptures, such as the pseudepigrapha, lies in both the quality and the quantity of their portrayal. The sanctioned scriptures present angels less frequently, and in general in roles such as bringing people messages from God. The unsanctioned texts, however, present more detailed characterizations of angels with more frequency, and these angels have very active roles.

Angels in the Christian Tradition and the New Testament

As with the Jewish Bible or Old Testament, the additional Biblical Texts, and the Talmud, angels feature prominently in the New Testament, proving their role in Christian faith equally or more important than that of Jewish faith.[18]

Angels in the Life of Jesus

The first reference to angels in the New Testament comes in the first chapter of the first book, Matthew. Aptly, this angel appears to announce the upcoming birth of Jesus to Joseph, telling Joseph of the preordination of his marriage to Mary and Jesus' destiny (Matthew 1:20-21; Luke 1:26-38). An angel, Gabriel, also appears to harken the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah and Elizabeth and portends of John's later role in the life of Jesus and the church (Luke 1:11-25). Soon after the birth announcements, the angel Gabriel appears to shepherds to trumpet the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:9-21) and to tell of his role as the messiah (Matthew 11:10; Matthew 25:31).

After Jesus' birth, an angel appears to warn Joseph about Herod's desire to kill Jesus and to tell Joseph to escape to Egypt. Later, the angel reappeared to tell Joseph to return to Israel, after Herod's death (Matthew 2:13-20). Other references to angels emphasize Jesus' role as the messiah (Matthew 1:20-24; Luke 1:26-38).

After Jesus becomes an adult and begins to fulfill his destiny, angels appear to declare him the Saviour (Luke 9:35-36).

Early in Jesus' ministry, the devil appears to challenge Jesus' identity as the Son of God. Angels come to his rescue, proving their close allegiance to the Savior:

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[18] The angels in the New Testament appear quite frequently, and many of their appearances come in the repetition of stories relating to the life of Jesus as told in the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Because of these books' common origins, their discussion of angels boosts the frequency of angel appearances, though not always the nature of these appearances

(Matthew 4:6,11; Mark 1:13; Luke 4:10). Later, when Jesus begins his ministry, he refers to angels a number of times. In one of his parabolic sermons, for example, he likens the role of angels to that of harvesters. Like harvesters "save" the crops, so, too, do angels "save" the righteous and rejoice over their salvation (Matthew 13:39; Luke 15:10). Jesus continues on to discuss the role of angels when he tells his disciples that he, like other Christians, will suffer in their battle for righteousness. In these discussions, Jesus clearly links the role of angels to their service as messengers of God (Matthew 13:41,16:27; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26, 12:8-9).

In his discussion of Christian faithfulness, Jesus tells the story of Lazarus, the poor but righteous man to whom a rich man denied food, who was later rescued by angels (Luke 16:22). As well, in the discussion of his ministry in the New Testament, Jesus refers a number of times to the role of angels in the Second Coming and in the final judgment[19]:

> So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just (Matthew 13:49)
>
> And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matthew 24:31)

In conjunction with his discussion of the Second Coming, Jesus mentions that the fallen angels and the devil will receive their punishment at Judgment (Matthew 25:41).

In a different vein, Jesus stresses the importance of caring for children in one of his sermons. He tells his listeners how childrens' innocence garners them a special place in heaven:

> Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 18:10)

In another unique mention of angels, while discussing the notion of life after death, one follower questions Jesus as to the nature of marriage in the afterlife. The follower wonders what happens when a widowed person who remarries encounters his or her multiple spouses in heaven. Jesus replies that dead people are like angels in that neither experience "marriage" in earthly terms.

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[19] This is also discussed at length in the final New Testament chapter, Revelation

Clearly, angels play a pivotal role in the life of Jesus. They hearken his birth, they save him during his trials, and they provide many points of discussion for his sermons to his followers. At the end of his earthly life, Jesus again mentions angels to his captors, after Judas betrays him. He tells them:

> Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? (Matthew 26:52-53)

Angels after Jesus' Death: Spreading the word of Christianity

Angels also prove important in Jesus' life after death and in the subsequent spread of Christianity. After the crucifixion of Jesus, angels once again appear to announce his resurrection. They come to Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James when the women go to the burial site of Jesus (John 20:12; Matthew 28:2-7; Luke 24:1-7, 23). Jesus declares his role as the savior, and this declaration opens the way for angels to minister on earth (John 1:51).

After the death of Jesus, angels appear to the faithful, whether to bring them messages or to guard them, such as when Peter is imprisoned (Acts 12:7). As in the Old Testament, the angels continue to minister justice in the New Testament, though now this justice relates to Christianity:

> I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God. (Luke 12:8-9)

Subsequent books of the New Testament discuss how, after Jesus' resurrection, the word of Christianity began to spread around the world. His disciples preached to Christian congregants, and they also communicated to these congregants in the form of letters, many of which became included in the text of the New Testament. These letters provide a number of references to angels.

First, Stephen spreads the word of Christianity, building on the common faith of Judaism, with patriarchs such as Moses who saw the angel in the burning bush (Acts

7:30, 35, 38). Paul attempts to spread the word, in the middle of a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadduccees, and angels figure into this dissension as the Pharisees believe in angels while the Sadduccees do not (Acts 23:9).

Later, Paul's letter to the Romans and the first letter of Peter make mention of the role of angels as messengers in the belief in Christianity (Romans 7:53; I Peter 1:13). Paul also suggests that though angels do bring the word of Christianity to the people, even angels do not have power over people's will to practice Christianity; indeed, God is above all (Romans 8:38). Much of the content of these letters aims at helping new followers truly understand the meaning and ministry of Christianity, including the role of angels. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul helps to answer many of their questions about the new religion of Christianity. Some of his discussion relates to the phenomenon of angels, with which the people of Corinth would have some familiarity:

> Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? (I Corinthians 6:3)
>
> For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels. (I Corinthians 11:10) [20]

In Paul's letter to the Galatians, his mention of angels underlines the role these celestial beings play in the change from Jewish law to Christian faith (Galatians 3:19).

In Paul's letter to Timothy, angels take on an even more prominent-sounding role, as they seem to become placed on the level of God and Jesus (I Timothy 3:16, 5:21). In later books, however, angels' place under God and Jesus is quite clearly established (I Peter 3:22; II Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6; Hebrews 1:8; Colossians 1:16). In the letter to the Hebrews, Jesus' preaching clarifies the role of angels, in a sense returning them to their role in earlier scriptures. In this letter, Jesus indicates that God's ministry serves man, giving man a higher role than the angels, who exist only on behalf of man (Hebrews 1:4-7). In the second chapter of the letter to the Hebrews, the message that angels brought to earth about Jesus receives special attention. The validity of this message demands that the Hebrew people recognize Jesus as the Messiah. Also during the letter to the Hebrews, the importance of Christian kindness illustrates yet another possible role for angels, which I used as the title of this project:

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[20] Van Der Hart (1972) wrote that, thus "a woman should protect against the advances of angels who are still tempted by female beauty," relating back to the fallen angels nuanced in Genesis 6:1-4.

> Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares (Hebrews 13:2) [21]

The letter of Peter reasserts the role of angels as subservient to Jesus, in another attempt to clarify their roles (I Peter 3:22). The second letter of Peter goes on to maintain that angels do not deserve the same level of awe that Jesus does, because God punished the angels for their lack of righteousness, just as he punished other sinners.

As the New Testament draws to a close, the role of angels in Judgment day becomes increasingly important. The book of Jude, for example, mentions fallen angels in an obvious reference to the pseudepigraphic book of Enoch:

> And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. (Jude 1:6)

Of course, the Book of Revelation brings extensive references to angels.[22] The book opens with Jesus' appearance to unlock the mysteries of the universe. Angels have a role in many of these mysteries. For example, the first few chapters of Revelation mention the structure of the heavens and earth, with distinct parallels to the topography laid out by Enoch in his journey through heaven:

> And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, (Revelation 7:1-2)

In later chapters of Revelation, the angels return to the trumpets blown at the first coming of Jesus to announce the second coming and Judgment Day: (8:2, 6, 13; 9:14). Angels warn people of the apocalypse through proclaimation (14:8),

Michael the archangel reappears in Revelation as a key protagonist in the fight for righteousness. His appearance in the New Testament bears strong similarity to his role in the Book of Enoch, as he draws the dividing line between righteousness and sin:

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[21] In a similar reference, in Genesis, Angels appear as strangers to Lot. Lot takes them in and in doing so is spared when God flattens Sodom and Gomorah.

[22] The book mentions angels at virtually every turn of phrase, so this discussion provides a representative sample of angel references, without attempting an exhaustive cataloguing.

> And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought (Revelation 12:7)

Angels also figure very prominently in the fabled signs of the Apocalypse. Here, they serve as both messengers and active agents of God's will in communicating these signs to the people of earth:

> And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God. And the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles. And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled (Revelation 15:1, 6-7)

Finally, at Judgment Day, the angels will lead the righteous into heaven (Revelation 21:9, 12; 22:1, 6-8).

In summary, the angels in the Old and New Testaments in the Bible serve to do the will of God, chiefly through interactions with humans. From the beginning of Christianity with the announcement of the coming of Jesus' birth to the Second Coming of Jesus and Judgment Day, angels play a number of very important roles in the history and teachings of the New Testament. They serve as messengers from God; they serve as exemplars for Jesus' sermons; they receive definitions of their roles in Christian life and life after death in the Letters; they become virtually synonymous with the Apocalypse. Although these angels were essentially sexless in the Bible (as Davidson (1967) wrote "angels are pure spirits and so should be presumed to be bodiless and, hence, sexless" (p. xxi), the Bible used male names (e.g Michael, Gabriel), although the "maleness" of these names may have occurred after the Biblical usage, rather than before. As well, while angels did have important roles in the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments portrayed angels as clearly under the power of God. According to Davidson (1967), God created angels to serve man, and God brought them into being and has the power to take them out as well (p. xx).

In examining the way angels were portrayed in the Bible, it becomes evident that some commonly held beliefs about angels do not have their roots in the Biblical tradition. As Ward (1969) wrote of the angel hierarchy, "Many people have had the notion that the souls of the dead were believed to become angels on their way into heaven, or that they took a form that enabled them to live intimately among angels. The popular picture, often derisively drawn, of the soul dressed in white robes, sitting on a cloud and playing a harp, must have come from this idea. Actually, the spiritual world as seen in the literature of the rabbis allows for a separate dwelling place for the souls of the righteous" (p. 33).

Even when examining strictly what the Bible says about angels, there remain some uncertain areas. As earlier mentioned, the comment about "fallen angels" that appears in Genesis 6:1-4 indicates that fallen angels came to earthy to have sexual relations with women, though the group refered to as "sons of God" could also mean entities other than angels. As well, Bandstra (1995) identified some areas about angels that remain somewhat in dispute. For example, on the issue of guardian angels, discussed in Acts 12:1-19 (when Peter's angel comes to the door), Bandstra (1995) indicated that there is not clear Biblical evidence that each person has a specific guardian angel. Perhaps, instead, angels guard only certain people only at certain times. Similarly, Bandstra (1995) noted that specific nations and churches may not have their own guardian angels, although Michael is generally thought to be the guardian of Israel. Finally, the identity of Satan is a bit unclear. As Ward (1969) noted, in the rabbinical writings, Satan appeared as the angel of death (p. 35). This seems somewhat inconsistent with the notion of Satan as "the adversary," which would make it unlikely that Satan would do the work of God in bringing people to heaven. It would, of course, accord with the notion that Satan would bring dying people to hell.

Though the role of angels remains that of servants of God, Jesus, and also Man, they form part of a very solid foundation for Christian faith in the New Testament, and, as I will discuss in further chapters, in later expressions of Christian spirituality through art and culture.

Angels and the Gnostic Tradition

While the established Judeo-Christian belief systems, including their attention to angels, have developed over more than two millenia into a mainstay of Western culture, some related religions have become virtually invisible. Gnosticism, one such tradition, presents an alternative (and some would say, equally valid) reading of spirituality. In particular, the mystic spirituality of Gnosticism provides a very different portrayal of angels than the Judeo-Christian tradition. The following section briefly explores how the Gnostic faith and its scriptural texts treat the subject of angelic entities.

The Nag Hammadi, a set of Gnostic texts, first came to light after its discovery in Egypt in December 1945 (Pagels, 1979). (This resembles the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.) The authorship and origins of these texts remain unclear, though Elaine Pagels (1979) presented the possibility that Judas Thomas, Jesus' twin brother, may have authored this collection of texts as a means to preserve the wisdom of Jesus during his earthly life. (Of course, Pagels (1979) also acknowledged that the "twin" of Jesus might serve as a metaphor of the reader's role in the text and the Gnostic tradition.) The found manuscripts date to about 400 C.E., though these manuscripts may be Coptic translations of Greek texts originally written in the first two centuries C.E. (Pagels, 1979).

While the exact origins of the texts remains uncertain, the content of the manuscripts clearly presents an alternative reading of the stories of the Christian tradition. As Pagels (1979) noted, "[t]hese diverse texts range, then, from secret gospels, poems, and quasi-philosophic descriptions of the origin of the universe, to myths, magic, and instructions for mystical practice" (p. 3). She continued on to speculate that these texts were buried because of a type of paternalistic Christian hegemony over the emergent religion in the early centuries that considered Gnosticism heretical.

Gnosticism and the Gnostic texts espouse that knowledge, rather than faith, holds the key to religious enlightenment. More specifically, Gnosticism searches for "knowledge as the means for the attainment of salvation itself and the claim to the possession of this knowledge in one's own articulate doctrine" (Jonas, 1958, p. 32). Gager (1975) asserted that Gnosticism emerged from the development of an intellectual class. Jonas (1958) noted that Gnosticism has Hellenic roots, as well as a foundation in the Judaic tradition, and that the religion emerged during the onset of Christianity. For Gnosticism to emerge, Gager (1975) believed that the Hellenic tradition of philosophical inquiry became limited, and philosophy declined as mysticism (like Christianity and Gnosticism) began to replace it. The Gnostic tradition developed as these intellectuals began to search outside the church for philosophical meaning intertwined with their religious faith. Gnostic groups "believe that the End had already come and with it the abolition of distinctions, sexual and otherwise, characteristic of the old-world order" (Gager, 1975, p. 36). In this way, the Gnostic tradition differs sharply from its Judeo-Christian precursors.

In part, these differences underline why angels take on a unique role in the Gnostic tradition, as compared to earlier traditions that remained prominent in Western society through the centuries. Wilson (1958) asserted that the development of Judaism, with its monotheistic focus, led to the "demotion" of "lesser gods" to angel status. The hierarchy established through this demotion likens the levels of angels and other divine beings with the hierarchy established in Persian angelology (Wilson, 1958). Such differences between Gnosticism and the Judeo-Christian tradition underscore how Gnosticism allows for a much different development of angel allegiance than the more established traditions. Pagels' (1979) argument develops key points of difference, including the resurrection, monotheism, and spiritual knowledge.

First, she asserted that Gnostics prefer to see the resurrection of Christ as a symbolic, rather than literal, event. Thus, they claimed that the experience of Jesus becomes one of *spirit*, or vision, and this focus on the spirit reflects in part the importance the gnostics place on angelic spirits. Second, Pagels (1979) discussed the Gnostic disbelief in monotheism, noting that "[s]ome scholars today consider Gnosticism synonymous with metaphysical dualism--or even with pluralities of gods" (p. 31. In the Gnostic tradition, the polytheistic conceptions of spirituality allow for the development of divine beings such as angels, and with this a partly feminine notion of the divine. Third, Pagels (1979) discussed the Gnostic notion that knowledge of God comes through the knowledge of self, while sin comes through ignorance. She likens the Gnostic pursuit for knowledge to psychotherapeutic pursuit of understanding human consciousness and the presence of Christ in each individual.

A more specific discussion of how the people of Gnosticism and Gnostic writings treat the subject of angels builds upon this foundation of the basic tenets of Gnosticism. Throughout the Gnostic scriptures, the treatment of angels emphasizes their essential role in the creation of the world and of humanity.[23] As the tradition of Gnosticism grew, the presentation of angels in the faith and its scriptures continued to gain strength.

First of all, we might consider Philo a pre-Gnostic, as he tried to infuse the theology of Judaism with the Hellenic intellectual tradition, though not in the full context of the Gnostic tradition. In early Gnostic writings, in the time of the Dead Sea Scrolls, "Philo speaks of logoi, of powers, of angels, but the exact relation of these to each other and to God is obscure" (Wilson, 1958, p. 46). Philo believed "the angels of Moses are the demons of the Greek philosophers, conceived as souls peopling the air, some of whom descend into matter to become men" (Wilson, 1958, p. 199). Later, the "true" Gnostics built upon these Hellenic ideas to more fully flesh out the function of angels in the non-pagan religious tradition.

Simon Magus (probably the earliest clearly identified Gnostic) and Saturnius definitively discussed angels and portrayed their role in theology as quite prominent in the act of creation (Simon Ireneaus 23, 2; Menander Ireneaus 23, 5; Saturnius Irenaeus 24,1). As Wilson (1958) wrote,"In [Saturninus's] system there is one god the Father, who created angels, archangels, virtues, and powers. The world and all that therein was created by seven angels, as was man, the latter being made in the likeness of a divine image which came down from above, but which was too spiritual for this lower system" (Wilson, 1958, p. 103). For Saturnius, "[t]he God of Jews was one of the angels, and because the ruling powers desired to destroy the Father, Christ came for their destruction and for the salvation of those who believed in Him, namely those who possessed the spark of life. Two kinds of men had been created by the angels, and since the demons aided the wicked, Christ the Saviour came to destroy the wicked, men and demons, and to save the good" (p. 103). Saturninus, like the gnostics before him, continued the tradition of construing angels as key in the creation of the earth and its inhabitants.

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[23] All of the gnostic scriptural quotations are taken from Werner Foerster's (1974) work *Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts*. As Foerster (1974) suggested, the citations in this section note the Gnostic gospel from which the scripture originated, followed by the Father from whom the specific citation originates, followed by the chapter and verse of the citation.

In the Simonite scriptures, Wilson (1958) wrote of God that "[H]is companion Helen...was the first conception of his mind, emanating from him as Athena from the head of Zeus; through her in the beginning he began to create angels and archangels" (p. 100) Later, "Helen..descended to lower regions and generated angels and powers, by whom the world was made" (p. 102). Ultimately, God "descended to redeem her, and to re-order the world, on account of the mis-government of the angels... and [t]he prophets were inspired by the lesser angels and were therefore no concern of those whose hope was set on him and on Ennoia. Men were saved by grace, not by works, for no man was evil by nature, but only by law, and law was a device of the angels who created the world, to enslave those who should obey them" (p. 102). In Simon's Gnostic tradition, angels took on roles of divine proportions, almost God-like in their relationship with man.

In a similarly divine vein, the writings of the "Associates of Marcion" include Apelles, who brings a unique perspective of angelic power to the gnostic tradition with his discussion of the four-part God:

> Apelles, who came from these, teaches thus: there is one good God, as Marcion also assumed, but the creator of all things is righteous, he who made what has come into being; a third is he who spoke to Moses--this one is fiery--and there is another, the fourth, the cause of evil. These he calls angels. (Apelles Hippolytus 8, 38, 1)

In the subsequent writings of Basilides, the role of angels expands further beyond the creation of the earth, as they receive credit for the creation of heaven, though they also exerted a high degree of control over men (Basilides Irenaeus 24, 4). As Foerster (1974) wrote, from God developed six "forces," from whom angels and powers developed to create a series of heavens and, finally, the earth. To save these men from their creator-angels, God sent down Nous, or Christ, in spirit form.

Beyond the Gnostic belief in angels as divine creators, the Cainites perceived angels similarly to the Catholic tradition of the good angel/bad angel (previously discussed in an earlier section) (Cainites Irenaeus 31, 2; Cainites Epiphanius 38, 2, 4). The book Baruch, attributed to Justin, also echoes the notion that the world divides itself along lines of good and evil, with good and evil angels ruling each side.

In the second century, the Gnostic mystic tradition developed more fully, including a group called the Ophites, whose triumverate included the supreme being of Anthropos, the Son of Man, and a female Holy Spirit (Wilson, 1958). As with previous conceptions of Gnosticism, the Ophites saw angels as divine creatures, virtually on par with God. The Ophites believed heaven formed from Sophia or Prinicus (who formed of dew), and after this she gives birth to the (God) Demiurge, or Ialdobaoth, who "becomes the first of a group of seven angelic powers, each of whom creates a heaven over which he rules" (p. 118). This belief reflects the Jewish tradition of angels overseeing nations (Trepp, 1982). In general, though, the prominence of angels in the Gnostic tradition provides a reaction against Judaism, which eschewed the power of angels to support the monothestic power of God. The Ophites do allow for the Christian conception of Christ, and angels serve as his companions (Wilson, 1958, p. 131).

Another well-established Gnostic tradition, the Apocryphon of John, one of the only Gnostic texts to pre-exist the discovery at Nag Hammadi, chiefly concerns the nature of the soul. As with the texts previously discussed, this text discusses how Ialdobaoth creates the powers and angels, who in turn create the world and the men who inhabit the world. As well, this text and others echo the words of Genesis, with discussions Adam and Eve, as well as of the fallen angels and the great flood. The discussions of Adam and Eve liken these two first humans to angels (Adam 64,1; Peretae Hippolytus; Archontics Ephesians 90, 7, 1). The treatment of Adam and Eve's other progeny, however, becomes a bit more contentious. The Gnostic texts discuss how the angels had a falling out over Cain and Abel, and the angels made war on each other (Sethians Epiphanius 39, 1-5). This war, then, indicates the divisiveness of the good and evil sons of Adam and Eve, and it also resembles the divisiveness of the good and evil angels (Apocryphon 61, 74; Sethians Ephesians 39, 4). Ultimately many angels will survive the flood and will continue on in their divine-like roles (Adam 64, 1; Adam 83, 1).

Other Gnostic scriptures take a more specifically Christian stance, moving beyond the general Judeo-Christian tradition . For example, the scriptures of Valentinus, a noted Gnostic father, mentions that angels bear strong resemblance to Biblical discussions of

Christian angels, such as with mention of the sowing/reaping parabolic Biblical story (Valentinus Heracleon 8, 49). As well, the angel Gabriel, who trumpeted the birth of Jesus, surfaces again in the writings of Valentinus (Valentinianism Ireneaus 15, 3). More specifically, the Valentinian scriptures mention angels frequently alongside Christ, with a decidedly Gnostic flavor (Valentinianism Clement 35, 1). These scriptures reflect how the Gnostic tradition comingled Christian notions with the Gnostic experience. The prominence given to angels and other Gnostic entities, however, undermines the authority of Christ established in Christianity. Some of the other Gnostic scriptures treat Christ in a more powerful Christian sense, though angels remain an integral part of his persona:

> Christ has everything in him, whether man or angel or mystery and the Father (Philip 20)
>
> [Jesus] [revealed himself] [to the] angels as angel and to men as men (Philip 58, 1).

Finally, as previously mentioned, one of the most marked difference between the Gnostic texts and Judeo-Christian texts lies in the treatment of male/female issues. Although the Gnostic scriptures do present a rather egalitarian view of men and women, most of the angels are portrayed as male, though the female Pistis Sophia could be considered an angel (Valentinianism Clement 2, 1; 21, 1, 3; 39; Philip 55). While the superiority of men and male angels still rises over the authority of women and female angelic entities, the division of power reflects gender equality more than the texts of the Judeo-Christian Bible.

This discussion shows that clearly the Gnostic religion developed out of the context of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and this foundation echoes in the treatment of angels in the Gnostic texts. As in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles, angels interact with Adam and Eve "before the fall." In addition, angels lead the earthly race to fall from grace, which later resulted in the great flood. Angels also surround the figure of Christ in the Gnostic gospels, as they do in the Christian gospels. These similarities dissolve substantially, however, in light of the qualitatively different way the Gnostic scriptures portray angels and their functions. Unlike in the Judeo-Christian tradition, where angels serve essentially to bring messages from God, angels take a very active role in human lives; in fact, they, not God, create the earth and its inhabitants. As well, the Gnostic scriptures portray issues of gender in a much more egalitarian fashion than do the more "traditional" scriptures through their depiction of male and female angelic beings, each with considerable power in the religious spectrum. This Gnostic gender equity opens a new door for the exploration of more profeminine religious discourses, such as the current interest in "angel faith" and Gnosticism itself. This revival, however, revives the potential for questioning of religious hegemony. As Pagels (1979) suggested, the highly powerful Gnostic characterizations of angels may have played a role in the suppression of Gnostic texts by the early Church fathers.

Angels in the Roman Empire And Beyond

Following the development of Christianity out of Judaism in the first centuries of the Common Era, the ebb and flow of the Roman Empire had a most profound effect on religious life and culture in Western Society. The Roman Empire persecuted Christians and Christianity in the early centuries of the Common Era, before Constantine ultimately accepted Christianity as the official religion of the Empire in the fourth century. This acceptance of Christianity, however, precursed the eventual decline and fall of the once great Empire. The years following "the fall" have received the title "the Dark Ages," reflecting the dimming of the light of Hellenic culture before the later bright Enlightenment, or "the Middle Ages," a slightly more neutral title nonetheless indicating a rather bland bridge between the spicy ancient culture and the exciting modern culture.

These imprecise and rather sweeping titles indicate the broad, undefined brush with which historians paint these "intervening years," and with good reason. The cultural artifacts from which we could learn about these times are sparse and sometimes uninspired. With just sketchy details to illustrate these years, taking an in-depth look at the culture seems all but impossible. One certainty about these centuries remains, however: religion was one of the most dominant forces at work in the years after the fall and before the Renaissance. In 313, Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, to require toleration of Christianity in the Roman Empire. Constantine's support of Christianity allegedly resulted from a dream he had where an angel appeared to him (Hartt, 1989, p.

273). After Constantine's acceptance of Christianity, Christians wanted to spread the word of their religion throughout the world (Stearns, Adas & Schwartz, 1992, p. 251). The form of Christianity (or Catholicism) that exists today enjoyed a clear dominance over other fledgling religions in the early centuries of the Common Era. As Lot (1931) noted, "[t]he religions and systems which competed with Christianity, Mithraism, Manicheism, Gnostic sects, had all disappeared or were hiding underground" (p. 391). This monopoly of sorts gave mainstream Christianity further strength in the post-Constantine years. Additionally, however, the artful blending of Hellenistic qualities such as administrative structure and an emphasis on learning with the unifying force of Christian monotheism and piety helped establish Christianity as the dominant religion (Stearns, Adas & Schwartz, 1992, p. 252).

Ward (1969) suggested that angels did not figure prominently in the early years of Christianity because of the tumultuous nature of these times as believers faced challenges to this new faith. After a time, however, the presence of angels increased as people sought them out for comfort and guidance (Ward, 1969). Ward (1969) mentioned the book *The Shepherd of Hermas,* a book read by many early Christians that tells a story of Hermas's encounters with angels and other Christian images, and it asserts that each man has both a good and evil angel overseeing him.

Although angels were familiar entities to early Christians, the lack of Christian religious art at the time makes it difficult to know how these Christians imagined what angels looked like. Through accounts such as the story of Hermas, Ward (1969) suggested the Christians of the time saw angels in the image of humans, including white robes or other regal human clothing. Later, in the fourth century, angelic imagery was artistically represented, often alongside pagan imagery. These angels often appeared as human, or they were represented as winged Greek Gods. As Ward (1969) noted, "Officially sexless, the angels of Byzantium were at least never feminine" (p. 84) and "the angel faces throughout the first millennium of Christian art remained strongly masculine" (p. 92). In the following centuries, angels were artistically represented with wings and nimbi, especially when the angels appeared alongside Christ. This imagery developed out of the portrayal of emperors (Ward, 1969). Even the positioning of angelic art in the early church had particular meaning. Angels appeared surrounding Christ, in the dome of the church. Overall, Christian art was particularly influenced by the style of the Byzantine Empire (Ward, 1969).

But how, exactly, were angels and symbols of angels a part of these "middle ages?" The answer to this question lies at the art of the matter. Although few artifacts of the Middle Ages still exist, churches, the art and artifacts contained within churches, and the artifacts buried with people have survived. This preservation of art allows for a window, however imperfect in its narrow vantagepoint back on time. Art is the expression of culture, and it provides a formal record of the places and times it represents. Furthermore, the church provides an excellent point for studying art that people of the time experienced, as "[f]or the common people it was only in the churches that art came close to their lives" (Ward, 1969, p. 125). Ward (1969) asserted that angels are prominent in art and religious culture because they connect God and Man (p. 96). Thus, these celestial beings bridge the earthly and heavenly spheres.

Angels in the Falling Empire (c. 300 - 600)

In the early part of the fourth century, Christianity gained a firm hold when Constantine, the ruler of the Empire, legitimized the religion. Despite its strength, however, Christianity may have played a role in the ultimate downfall of the Empire as the mysticism necessary for Christian faith lay at odds with the rational, yet sinful, Roman tradition. As Smitha (1997) noted, "Christianity could not save Rome...because those with power, including Christian emperors, could not erase the taint of humanity's sin. Rome...had to perish as had the wicked cities of the Old Testament." Rome began falling in the sixth and seventh centuries, due to factors such as invasions and the spread of Islam.

Despite the unrest caused by the decline of the Roman Empire, this period of establishment of the Christian Church marks a period of great activity in the symbols of angels in Christian culture. Hassett (1913) suggested that the art world, prior to Constantine's legitimation of Christianity, did not depict angels with any frequency, and Ward (1969) argued that early Christians would not have represented angels in art, preferring instead to represent Jesus. Presumably the dearth of images also reflects the persecution of Christians occurring at that time. With the ascension of Constantine to the throne, though, art in the form of paintings, mosaics, and personal artifacts began incorporating images of angels, though not without conflict. Wilson (1980) noted that "the council of Nicea in 325 declared belief in Angels a part of dogma" and "in 343 the Synod Laodicea condemned the worship of angels as 'idoloatry'" (p. 22).

Ward (1969) noted that art of the late third and early fourth centuries began to depict Biblical images alongside non-Christian images (such as putti—cupidlike characters—and animals), and angels began to appear in this context. These depictions, however, did not appear constructed in a uniform way (e.g. all with wings), as people of the time believed angels could take on any form they wished. Nonetheless, angels in human-like form became popular symbols in the art of the fourth through the sixth centuries. In particular, stories from the Old and New Testaments featuring angels became popular subjects. Of course, frequently angels appeared as supporting characters for Christ, though fewer of these images seem to have survived the years.

The images of angels in these early Christian centuries strongly resembled the Greek gods of Hellenic art, as artists used these gods as models. The angels had fairly classical, androgynous looks, though they seem male. In addition, their images include the commonplace symbol of the halo or nimbi to signify their status, as well as wings to differentiate them from humans. (See Illustration 1.)

ILLUSTRATION 1
Detail, Archangel
c. 6th century
S. ApollinaireClasse

Image Source: Lester, 2000

The presence of angels and other religious images in art of the time brought a strong symbol of Christianity to the pagans or country dwellers, who had few religious texts of any sort at their disposal (Lot, 1931, p. 390).

As the church gained prominence in these centuries, mysticism became an essential element of society. The rationality of the Hellenic world faded as people began to embrace the faith of Christianity, and it further eroded with the influx of Eastern culture. As Moss (1935) wrote, people of the early centuries believed in guardian angels, and this mystic notion has remained a part of Western culture throughout the ages well beyond the fall of the Empire.

To keep Christianity strong, the artistic images sanctioned by the church began to use fewer angels towards the beginning of the sixth century, as the Roman Empire declined. This resulted from the desire to further separate the monotheistic Christian faith from the polytheistic paganism practiced in the earlier Roman Empire (Ward, 1969, p. 93). To separate Christianity from Judaism, Old Testament Biblical scenes grew out of favor as artists preferred the New Testament, more acceptable in the Christian Roman Empire.

At this time, art began using fewer images of angels, replacing them with the more Christian figures of saints and martyrs. This reflects a tendency towards a more human sort of faith that continued in subsequent years. As well, during the sixth and seventh centuries, stories of saints helped spread the world of Christianity, and angels usually played a part as intermediaries between the saints and God (Ward, 1969). Though angels became a popular feature of art in the fourth through seventh centuries, as the ensuing Dark Ages grew closer, angels disappeared from art for a time.

Angels from the Fall to the Rise of Charlemagne (c. 600 - 800)

Art historian Janson (1996) identified the seventh and eighth centuries as the true "Dark Ages, "when the bright light of the Roman empire faded as "center of gravity of European civilization shifted northward from the Mediterranean and the economic, political and spiritual framework of the Middle Ages began to take place" (p. 284). The eighth century also saw a darkening of the images of angels in art. In 726, the

Iconoclastic Controversy ensued from an imperial edict that prohibited religious images (Janson, 1996). Although the Seventh Ecumenical council revoked this edict in 787, that period saw far fewer religious images in art, and thus fewer treatments of angels (Wilson, 1980). While the Synod "reinstated a carefully defined and limited cult of the Archangels which took root in the Eastern Church…in the West, however, the distrust of angels remained stronger" (Wilson, 1980, p. 22). Further, iconoclasts destroyed much of Byzantine art, forcing artists to use personal artifacts to express their religion (Wilson, 1980).

During these years, personal artifacts such as book covers, wallhangings and crosses featured religious images such as angels, as Illustration 2 depicts. Art with Christ as a central figure remained largely acceptable despite the prohibition of iconoclasm.

ILLUSTRATION 2
The Annunciation
c. 8th – early 9th c.
Constantinople

Image Source:
Museo Sacra I, 2000

These items would be easy to hide or move if necessary, to disguise iconoclastic beliefs. These "dark ages" of angel images, forced out of public art and into personal artifacts, did not last very long. In the ninth century, angels returned to the art world and flourished for several centuries.

Angels Around The Turn Of The Millennium (C. 800 - 1300)

In 800, Charlemagne took power of the Holy Roman Empire, bringing with him a renewed fervor for the Christian religion. In 848, the Holy Image was reinstated, bringing angels and other previously iconic images back into mainstream art in multitudes. Though the image of angels remained predominantly male, as in earlier centuries, the potency of angel images became somewhat prescribed.

Angels continued to appear as companions to Christ, usually with Christ at the center and the angels flanking him, sporting haloes as in earlier images. As well, Biblical interpretations incorporating angels continued to appear, such as the story of Balaam and his Ass, as Illustration 3 depicts. The archangels Michael and Gabriel (most prominent in Christianity) became clearly identified, as well.

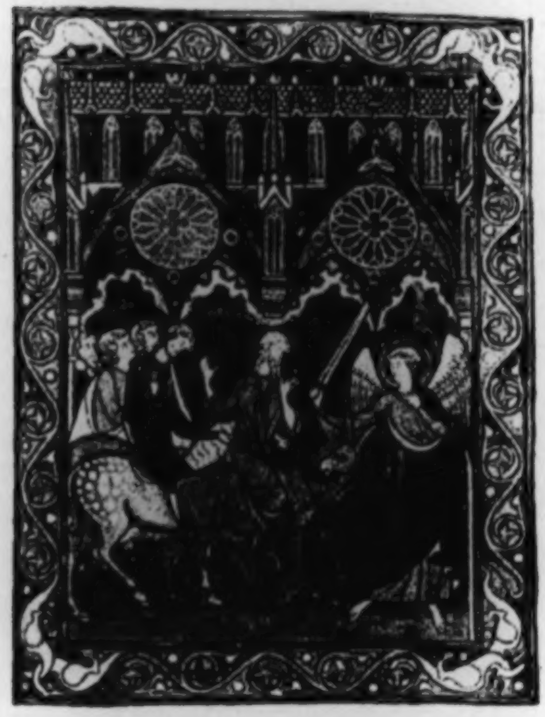

ILLUSTRATION 3
Balaam and his Ass
From: Psalter of St. Louise
c. 1252-70
Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris

Image Source: Gothic Illuminated Manuscripts

During the time of the Middle Ages, a time of high levels of illiteracy and mysticism, angels became especially important in human life (Ward, 1969). Dionysius the Areopagite, writing in the 7th c, established the hierarchy of angels, though belief in demons and Satan especially fluorished (Ward, 1969). Belief in angels at the time focused around guardians for "the simple-minded, the very old, the devout, or contrite women and they dying " (p. 114). Increasingly, though, the angels continued to lose prominence as saints entered pictures with more frequency. Many pictures featured Christ with both angels and saints surrounding him, often in pairs. Ward (1969) saw this depiction of angels and saints as inherent in the uniquely Christian tradition, as "Angels had a part not only in the Gospel scenes in which they were said to have appeared, but as celestial presences in the adoration of the virgin and child and the glorification of the saints and martyrs" (p. 92). The images of saints, however, became virtually indistinguishable from angels, as both appear as male characters in robes, wearing haloes. Only the wings clearly identified an angel. This blurring of the saintly and angelic images brought these transcendental creatures down to earth, so that the unsophisticated peasant could appreciate these images in their proper context and hierarchy.

While the increased presence of saintly images lessened the impact of angels in the art world, the embrace of Mary as a central religious figure further relegated angels to a peripheral role. The Marian ideal had a humanizing influence on Christianity, as people could identify even more closely with this maternal character, more so than the seemingly superhuman saints (Ward, 1969). Perhaps the embracing of Mary allowed Christians a more passive role in their Church, as her call to serve required less agentry than the constant holy vigilance required of saints. As well, possibly the more feminine image of Mary provided a more aesthetically appealing figure than the androgynous, though seemingly male, depictions of angels.

As Mary became a prominent figure in Christian art, angels began to appear more as her attendants than active figures of their own. Countless renderings of the Virgin and Child feature angels in a supporting role, such as Giotto's *Lamentation*, shown in Illustration 4 below.

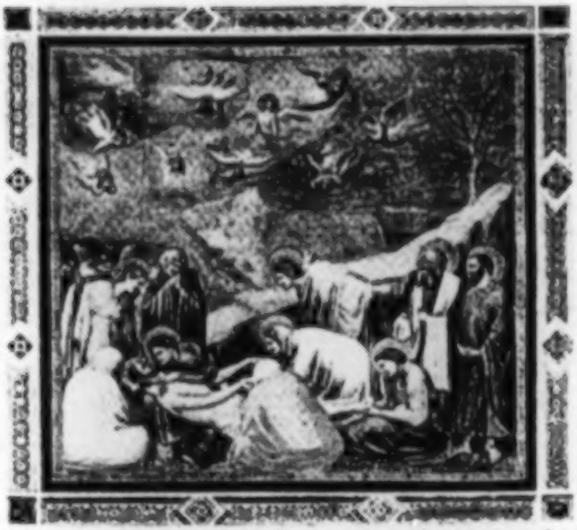

ILLUSTRATION 4
The Lamentation
Giotto
c. 1305-1306
Arena Chapel, Padua

Image Source: Giotto, 1999

This depiction strongly characterizes the portrayal of images of angels as the Middle Ages flowed into the rebirth or renaissance of Classic culture

By the end of the Middle Ages, the role of angels in art had come full circle. In the early years of the Church, masculine angels images resembling Greek gods frequently adorned artistic work, especially in Biblical paintings. For the century or so in the "Dark Ages," angels dropped from favor in the art world. However, they returned in the ninth century with renewed perseverance but reduced prominence, still mostly male yet with less potency than before. During the years around the first millennium, angel images became closely identified with Saints, losing further autonomy with the advent of Marianism. This fall (in popularity) of angel imagery reached a critical point in subsequent years as the Enlightenment proved a dark age indeed for angels.

Angels in the Renaissance

In the 1300s, the Renaissance began to emerge in Western culture. Janson (1996) saw the Renaissance as differing from the Middle Ages less in actual, observable phenomenon and more in terms of people's psychological perceptions of time. He deemed the Middle Ages as an era when people saw time as divided into two distinct categories: before and after the birth of Christ. In the Renaissance, however, he believed people began seeing their lives and culture as markedly different from those of antiquity due less to religious demarcations and more to the accomplishments of humankind. De La Croix, Tansey, and Kirkpatrick (1991) said that in the Renaissance, "nature and the relations among human beings simply became more interesting than theological questions" (p. 552). During this period, for the first time in the Common Era, the Christian religion began a slow erosion as science and other "rational" subjects stepped to the forefront.

Another key difference in human thinking that occurred during the Renaissance, according to De La Croix et al (1991), involved human agency in the context of divine will. They believe that people of the Middle Ages saw themselves as instruments of God, in a clearly defined sphere of earthly influence. In the Renaissance, De La Croix et al (1991) asserted, people began to shift to the view that humans have the ability to shape their own lives in any way they choose. This notion inspires their question: "Could one really aspire beyond the angels or debase oneself below the beasts and inanimate nature, given one's place in the carefully articulated "chain of being" that God had made permanent?" (p. 553). This shift in thinking indicates, as well, a shift in the attention paid to spiritual beings like angels during the Renaissance period. Angels and other celestial beings began a slow emigration to the literal and figurative periphery of the canvas, as a reflection of angels' increasingly peripheral role in human life. This occurred in many artistic representations, particularly during the Renaissance, featuring cupids, and the Romantic period, where angels are sexless and sentimentalized, and even emasculated (Robinson, as discussed in Bandstra, 1995).

Nonetheless, Christianity still reigned in the Renaissance period, in an interesting symbiotic relationship with the renaissance of the Classical Age. As De La Croix et al (1991) wrote "here and there, the antagonism between the pagan and the Christian traditions may have manifested itself--and certainly it was bound to continue to exist--but in general, the Renaissance achieved a natural, sometimes effortless, reconciliation of the two" (p. 556). This relationship involved shifting perceptions about religious images and symbols such as angels. Thus, as the spiritual world of the Middle Ages reconnected with the rational world of the Classical Age, new treatments of religious iconography such as angels emerged.

Dante, writing in the 14th c., continued to support the notion of angels as guardians and guides of humans. Dante wrote of the nine ranks of angels, and his imagery incorporates light and white in his constructions of angels. Interestingly, Dante used Saint Bernard as his spiritual guide in Paradise, and Bernard is credited with the "Mary cult" that arose in the late Middle Ages that, along with the surge of saints and martyrs, usurped the centrality of angels in spiritual life (Ward, 1969).

The Renaissance saw a multiplicity of angel images in art, breaking out of the previously narrow portrayals.[24] Angels became more youthful, even childlike, and often appeared in a more lighthearted manner, even smiling. Some angels began to appear androgynous, or even feminine, though the archangels tended to be masculine overall (Ward, 1969). During this time, the cherubim of the Bible morphed into cherubic winged heads and chubby infants. In sum, Ward (1969) concluded "Authority was now altogether missing form the angel image. Innocence, sweetness, grace, and joyousness, all characteristics of youth, gave pleasure to the eye and such relief to the souls as the companionship of amiable children can provide " (p. 140). While the authority of angels had ebbed somewhat, so, too, did the authority of Christian art, as literacy rose and people experienced art in secular contexts.

Another reason for the ebbing of the popularity of angels was the rise of Protestantism. Luther and Calvin's focus on the rational elements of religion and the centrality of individual responsibility became prominent aspects of society (Ward, 1969). Nonetheless, angels figured prominently in the works of Puritan authors such as Bunyan, whose mention of angels entirely reflected Biblical treatments (Ward 1969).

The early art of the Renaissance (sometimes called late Gothic) often blended religious images with everyday domestic scenes. For example, Campin's *The Merode Altarpiece* (c. 1425-1428) depicts the annunciation of Mary, with an angel portrayed alongside Mary in a domestic context. (See Illustration 5.) Thus, the blending of

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[24] In this and following sections, the artistic images I focus on include elite art. While angels and other religious figures were likely part of popular or peasant art of the time (e.g. personal religious objects), these artifacts have not been preserved as widely as elite artistic expressions and are thus less available for study. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, peasants would likely have seen elite art in the context of the church, so the examination of elite art would provide a form of insight into the general religious and cultural character of the times.

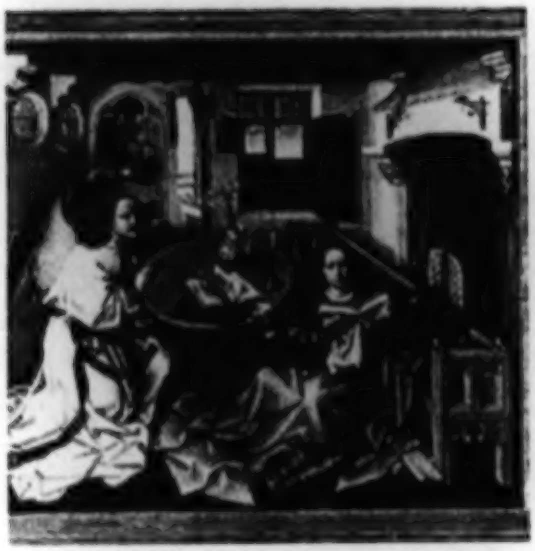

ILLUSTRATION 5
The Merode Altarpiece
(Center Panel)
Robert Campin (Master of Flemalle)
c. 1425-8
The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum
of Art, New York

Image Source: Applied History, 1998

supernatural and natural images often occurred, perhaps to bring religion into a familiar context for common people. The painting of the time tended towards more realism than that of previous centuries, though again the juxtapositioning of celestial figures like angels alongside terrestrial images provided an interesting contrast. As in previous times, the scenes frequently depicted Christ and/or Mary, with angels serving as their attendants, as *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Two Angels,* shown in Illustration 6, depicts.

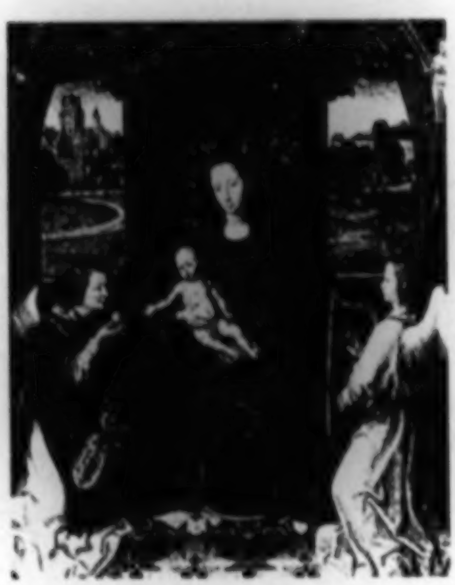

ILLUSTRATION 6

Madonna and Child Enthroned with Two Angels

Memling
c. 1480

Image Source: Holladay, 1997

The angels continue to appear male, though increasingly androgynous and difficult to clearly separate from Mary, who increasingly becomes the central figure in art, a phenomenon that began in the Middle Ages. They wear flowing robes may have halos, similar to the way saints are portrayed, and sometimes wings.

"Young angels," that appear like cherubs or cupids, allow for the continuation of the male appearance of angels. De La Croix et al (1991) called these cupids as depicted in Mantegna's *Camera degli Sposi* (c.1474) "Sons of Venus," further removing these angelic figures from a Christian heritage and indicating a rebirth of Hellenic angel figures. (See Illustration 7.)

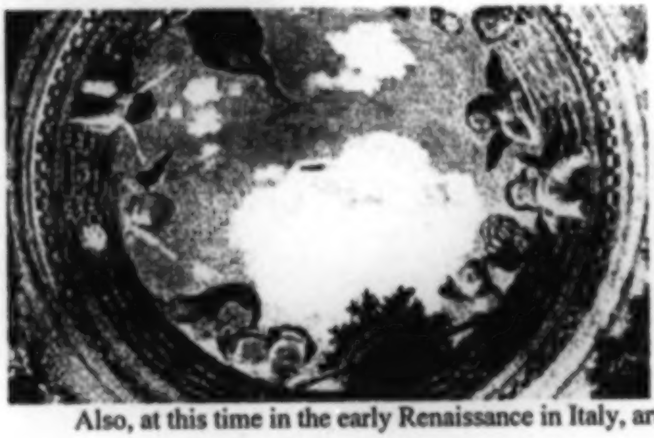

ILLUSTRATION 7
Camera degli Sposi
(cropped)
Mantegna
c. 1474

Image Source: MyNet (1999).

Also, at this time in the early Renaissance in Italy, artists began exploring subject matter other than religious stories and symbols, with portrait painting, for example. As well, the exploration of Neo-Platonic images and thought took place as some people began perceiving all knowledge, whether religious or pagan, as springing from the same, ultimately divine source (Janson, 1996). As shown in Illustration 8, Botticelli's portrait of the *Birth of Venus* (c. 1482), for example, shows a scene that hearkens back to classical polytheism, yet it also includes an angelic presence in the form of the wind gods at the left of the picture (Janson, 1996).

ILLUSTRATION 8
The Birth of Venus
Botticelli
c. 1482

Image Source: Pioch, 1996

The art of the late or high Renaissance in Italy can be exemplified by the work of several great masters. Da Vinci, for example, continued to paint chiefly religious scenes, though many did not include angels (*The Last Supper*, for example). Da Vinci's *Virgin of the Rocks* (c. 1485) portrays a young Jesus and a young St. John, with the Virgin in the center and an angel alongside the group (Janson, 1996). At this time, the depictions of Christ as a child begin to look more childlike, rather than previous depictions that show Christ as having a child's body with the head of the adult Christ. The angel differs markedly from other portrayals: it is a she, and it does not have a halo or wings. As well, Da Vinci's style gave a less realistic, more dreamlike quality to his work than some of the earlier Renaissance work (Janson, 1996). (See Illustration 9.)

ILLUSTRATION 9
Virgin of the Rocks
Leonardo da Vinci
c. 1485

Image Source: The Collection, 1998

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Of course, Michelangelo's work on the ceiling of the Sistine chapel (c. 1508-1512) remains one of the indisputable icons of art throughout the ages. This monumental work depicts a number of Biblical scenes, all of which feature angels quite prominently in the Bible, though their presence in Michelangelo's work seems tentative and secondary. Michelangelo's angels appear chiefly male, reminiscent of Greek gods, with de-emphasized wings and small halos, apparently without nimbi. As well, the angels appear nude, a heretofore uncommon portrayal. His depiction of *The Fall of Man and the Expulsion from the Garden of Eden,* seen in Illustration 10 below, shows what appears to be an angel, though as the character (perhaps female) doesn't have wings or a halo, this is not entirely clear. In these ways, Michelangelo's epic work breaks the pattern established by other artists of portraying androgynous (leaning heavily toward the feminine side) angels with haloes and nimbi, in heavy robes.

ILLUSTRATION 10
The Fall of Man and the Expulsion from the Garden of Eden
Michelangelo
c. 1508-1512
Sistine Chapel, Vatican City

Image Source: Capella Sistina, 2000

As Illustration 11, below, shows, Raphael's painting of *Galatea* depicts angels, though as cupid-like attendants of the nymph Galatea of Greek mythology (Janson, 1996).

ILLUSTRATION 11
The Nymph Galatea
Raphael
c. 1512-1514
Villa Farnesina, Italy

Image Source:
Pioch, 1996a

Tintoretto's *The Last Supper* (1594) portrays angels in a very different way, as Illustration 12 shows. In this time precursing the Baroque period, the use of light and darkness became central to painters' methods of evoking mood in their creations. Tintoretto's painting shows light emanating clearly from Christ, in the center of the picture, and this light reflects off of the disciples who receive the sacrament. The depiction of angels at the top of the painting shows these spiritual beings clearly as spirits, almost transparent. Their gender and other characteristics do not seem readily apparent through the diffuse rendering.

ILLUSTRATION 12
The Last Supper
Tintoretto
1594
S. Giorgio Maggiore, Venice, Italy

Image Source: Last Supper, 1999-2000

In the years following the high renaissance in Italy, the Protestant reformation took place, spurred on by Martin Luther in 1517 (Janson, 1996). This major societal change represents the type of enlightenment epochal shifts taking place at the time, and scholars have come to call the period after the Renaissance the "Baroque" period.

Angels and Art in the Baroque Period of Enlightenment

In the Baroque period, approximately 1600 to 1750, art took on a very dynamic quality, reflecting the dynamic changes society underwent at the time (De La Croix et al, 1991). This dynamism, compared to the more static quality of Renaissance art, reflected a period that, through the revival of the Classical period, seems much less revolutionary than the ensuing Baroque period of enlightenment. As De La Croix et al (1991) commented "like the art it produced, the Baroque era was manifold--spacious and dynamic, brilliant and colorful, theatrical and passionate, sensual and ecstatic opulent and extravagant, versatile and *virtuoso*" (p. 750).

Sullivan (1996) called the Baroque period "the first modern age" because of the rapid advancements society underwent. In particular, he noted the scientific advancements in terms of physics and astronomy (courtesy of luminaries such as Newton, Copernicus, and Galileo). Further, the political situation in Europe at the time reflects the casting of suspicion on absolute monarchies, combated by artistic endeavors meant to glorify the monarchies, especially in Spain and France.

Sullivan (1996) also suggested that the Reformation and the opposing Counter Reformation movement in religious spheres prompted major shifts in society. These movements began to suggest that "the mysteries of faith are revealed not by intellectual speculation but spontaneously, through an inward experience open to all people" (Janson, 1996, p. 549). De La Croix et al (1991) suggested that this time instigated the blending of religion and science into an unlikely and tentative alliance, with God setting into motion the laws of science (p. 557). This relationship illustrates "the conflict of reason and passion" characteristic of the Baroque period, a time of great artistic creativity (De La Croix et al, 1991, p. 751).

One of the most marked characteristics of Baroque art came in artists' use of light, in a sense reflecting the nature of "enlightenment." In this period, the source of light within a painting became increasingly important. It sometimes reflected divine inspiration, and at other times it reflected an external, secular source for "enlightenment." Another characteristic of Baroque art, realism, also reflects the changing relationship between the church and the scientific world. As well, art of the time tried to portray the illusion of a "limitless space" on the canvas (Sullivan, 1996).

In a "saintly" painting, Fra Andrea Pozzo's *The Glorification of St. Ignatius* (1691-1694) depicts a number of angelic figures in a heavenly setting that attempts to show a limitless celestial ceiling. De La Croix et al (1991) suggested that this "Baroque expansiveness" attempts to reconcile science and religion, with science having an upper hand, writing that "The clouds of Heaven are not simply the seat of angels; seventeenth-century scientists discover that they are water vapor" (p. 775). As well, the angels in Pozzo's work suggest a more terrestrial approach to the celestial figures of angels, as they appear quite androgynous, loosely clothed in toga-like robes, with wings on their backs. This depiction bears much similarity to prior depictions; however, the angels in this work clearly lack haloes or nimbi that give them divine "light" around their heads.

Another characteristic of angels in Baroque art appears in their absence. Whereas earlier art most frequently depicted Christ and Mary flanked by angels and saints, a number of prominent Baroque paintings depicted Christ in more *realistic* settings, such as Rubens' portraits of Christ and *The Elevation of the Cross* and *The Descent of the Cross*. These painting shows a very lifelike Christ, surrounded not by angels and saints but apparently by burly Roman executioners and human followers. Interestingly, Rubens' more secular panting of the *The Apotheosis of Henry IV and the Proclaimation of the Descent of Marie de Medici* shows an angel floating transparently above this scene where the terrestrial world of the aristocracy meets a heavenly scene.

As well, Rubens' portrait of *Christ and St. John with Angels* portrays these two biblical greats as chubby cherubic children, alongside apparent celestial playmates. (See Illustration 13.) This imagery deviates significantly from previous portraits of the adult Christ frequently portrayed with saints and angels.

ILLUSTRATION 13
Christ and St. John with Angels
Rubens
c. 1610
Wilton House, Wiltshire, England

Image Source: Pioch, 1996

Of course, more and more paintings during the Baroque period featured purely secular scenes, so proportionately fewer of the paintings of the period featured angels as compared with earlier art. These secular paintings depicted portraits, landscapes, and domestic scenes including still lifes, all without the celestial presence of angelic beings in any form.

In another artistic genre, Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667) features a number of angel characters in a style typical of the Enlightenment. This poem deals with the fall of man, in a duel between good and evil. Milton uses Biblical angels (Michael, Uriel, Raphael, Gabriel, and Satan) as a foundation for his work, supplemented with imagery and characters from the Classical Age (Urania and Chaos). Ward (1969) suggested that this tension reflects the societal tension between the Judeo-Christian culture and the reborn Hellenic culture. She wrote "The war between heaven and hell is in a sense the conflict between Milton's conception of the value of human culture and his Puritan denial of value to everything that is of the earth" (p. 154). As well, Milton gives more prominence to Satan than the "good" angels. Ward (1969) asserted that "although his theme is ostensibly the fall of man, his readers become aware that the real hero of *Paradise Lost* is Satan" (p. 152). This questioning of traditional conceptions of good and evil underlines the renewed interest in rationality over spirituality, just as the plastic arts did at the time.

Thus, in both the characteristics of the presence and the absence of angels in

Baroque art and Enlightenment literature, a dramatic change in religious iconography and presentation took place during this Age of Reason. During the 18th c. Enlightenment thinking relegated angels to the periphery in most religious circles. Emanuel Swedenborg and William Blake, however, placed angels at the centers of their spiritual expressions. As Ward (1969) wrote, "Swedenborg's angels were not a separate order of beings but human souls who, by a series of progressions, had become members of the celestial realm" (p. 162). Swedenborg's work influenced William Blake and his philosophy, writing, and art. In Blake's writing, angels figured as supporting case members, with humans in the leading roles (Ward, 1969). Blake conceived of angels in the traditional Biblical sense, as entities different from humans and created by God. Blake did depart from this traditional view, though as his angels were constructed as passive, apparently intellectually inferior to Devils and Demons (Ward, 1969).

In particular, *Paradise Lost* and *Dante's Divine Comedy* inspired Blake to adopt subject matter of a chiefly religious nature (William Blake, 1996). He took his artistic inspiration from Michelangelo and the Renaissance Mannerism (Janson, 1995). His *Angels watching over the Tomb of Christ* (1806) shows two very feminine angels with wings, but no haloes, floating over the body of Christ. The most light in the picture emanates not from Christ, but from an undetermined source between the two angels. This differs dramatically from earlier art, which traditionally depicted Christ or Mary as the "source" of light. This change, although slight, reflects the lessening role of religion on society, through artistic expression. Some of Blake's other images, however, portray angels as considerably more masculine. His *Good and Evil Angels* (c. 1810), shown below in Illustration 14, and Michael and Satan (1810) depict rather violent images of righteous angels fighting forces of evil. These clearly masculine images lack the usual hallmarks of wings and halos, which differs from most depictions of angels at this time or in previous years.

ILLUSTRATION 14
Good and Evil Angels
William Blake
c. 1810

Image Source:
Good and Evil, 1998

Blake's near obsession with angels did not occur in a cultural vacuum, of course. Rather, the religious philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg clearly influenced Blake's thought and expressions in work. Emanuel Swedenborg, a Swedish scientist-turned-theologian, lived during the late eighteenth century (Swedenborg, 1996). His work influenced many later philosophers, artists, and theologians, including William Blake, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Madame Blavatsky (Burnham, 1990; Washington, 1996). Swedenborg began his career as a theologian in the last half of the eighteenth century, following a supernatural experience through which he claimed he began to divine the true nature of God. He reported having many more such experiences that included communing with angels, and he wrote of his experiences in a number of books that have influenced others' belief in angels (Swedenborg, 1996).

Through his meetings with angels, Swedenborg supposedly learned a great deal about the nature of these celestial bodies. He asserted that angels only become visible to people through angels' assumption of a physical body or through a heightened consciousness on the part of some people that enables them to see angels in a non-physical plane (Burnham, 1990). Burnham (1990) wrote that "the angels told [Swedenborg] many things, including that the soul lives in the body not as a bird in a cage but as water in a sponge, every pore fully saturated with it, that after death one's sex remains: a man continues as a man-spirit, a woman remains a woman-spirit, and if they loved on earth, they still continue to conjoin" (p. 185).[25]

Swedenborg also wrote many descriptions of angels and their activities, based on his purported experiences. He wrote that they "breathe an atmosphere adapted to their angelic lungs" and that they both speak and write (Burnham, 1990, p. 186). When they speak, "they express affection with vowels...ideas with consonants, and their total communication with words" (Burnham, 1990, p. 186). In line with much Biblical teaching, Swedenborg described angels' chief role as "agents of God," as they do God's will on earth (Burnham, 1990, p. 186).

Kirven (1994), a past president and professor emeritus of the Southwest School of Religion in Newton, Mass., wrote that "one observer, Emanuel Swedenborg, spent more than twenty-seven years in almost daily conversation and activity with angels and other spirits" (p. xi). Based on Swedenborg's writings, Kirven (1994) suggested that angels' pursuits include such things as serving God, enjoying recreation, and experiencing periods of rest. Specifically, Kirven (1994) wrote that angels function to aid humans, especially the dying, infants, lost souls, and celebrants. He intimated that angels have a particular calling to one of these functions.

Kirven (1994) wrote that, according to Swedenborg, there are both spirits (good and evil humans who have not yet made it to heaven or hell) as well as angels, non-human entities. The spirits, as once humans, are of course more familiar to humans than the non-human angels. Kirven (1994) wrote, "angels and other spirits once were human beings living the life that all of us know on this earth or another in the universe" (p. 48-49). Swedenborg believed that although humans' natural, spiritual state enables ease of communication with angels, modern focus on physical concerns dis-ables this function for many people (Kirven , 1994, p. 50). Angels and humans are similar not just spiritually, according to Swedenborg, but they both wear clothes, live in houses, rest, and play. According to Kirven (1994), Swedenborg believed that angels also experience marriage, although not precisely the same as humans. (Swedenborg described this in detail in his 1748 *Conjugal Love).* Kirven (1994) suggested that humans should be open to angel experiences as a means to enrich their lives.

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[25] This teaching seems to conflict somewhat with the teaching of Jesus set forth in the synoptic gospels. For example, in the book of Mark, Jesus said "For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Mark 11:25). Jesus gave this commentary in response to the question of the nature of marriage in the afterlife for remarried widows. We might extrapolate, then, that Swedenborg's "man-spirit" and "woman-spirit" would find it difficult to "conjoin" in a realm where Jesus makes it quite plain that marriage does not exist.

Though Swedenborg himself may not have intended his teachings to later form the foundation for a religious sect, his followers known as the Swedenborgians carried out his divine words in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Today, in Great Britain, there are about 5000 practicing Swedenborgians, and about the same number in the United States (Swedenborg, 1996). Thus, his teachings about divine inspiration and the roles of angels in human life still have a place in contemporary society. As well, Swedenborg's teachings, as previously mentioned, influenced a number of secular thinkers and theologians during the nineteenth century. In particular, the spiritualists and theosophists of the late 19th century paralleled the Swedenborgians in their discussion and treatment of divine knowledge through "intercourse" with spirits. These movements are discussed in more detail in a later section on Nineteenth century culture.

Angels and Art in the Rococo Period

The second half of the eighteenth century marks a departure from a "purely Baroque" style to a style many call "Rococo." While one of the most essential features of this period remains the process of "enlightenment" characterized by developments in science, the political scene took on special import in this last half of the eighteenth century. At this point, the American and French Revolutions took place, and "The ruling aristocracies, as if conscious of their wanting historical significance, gradually abandoned their administrative and executive functions to members of the increasingly wealthy and influential middle class, the Third Estate" (De La Croix et al, 1991). The aristocracy then reveled in their remaining sphere of influence: superficial leisure. The art of the brief Rococo period reflects this whimsical nature of the aristocracy at play, in light and foamy colors.

Boucher's *Venus Consoling Love* or *Cupid a Captive* (1751) shows this whimsy, as nude reclining woman surrounds the chubby angelic figure of Cupid. (See Illustration

15.) Above the cupid figure, two cherubic figures float, looking down on the captive fate of their mate Cupid.

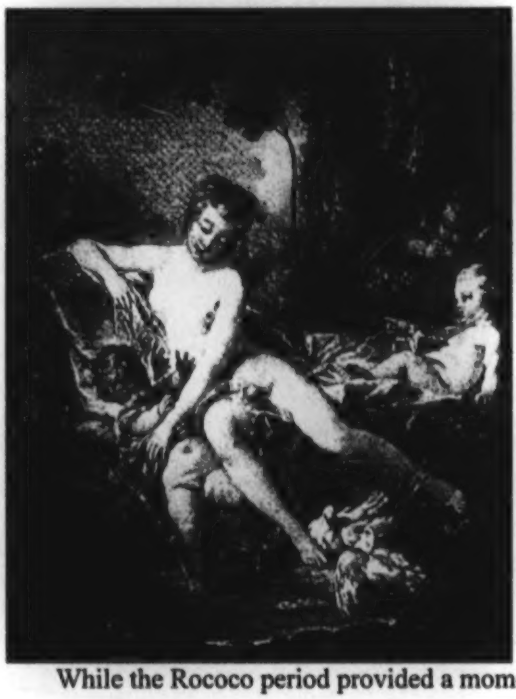

ILLUSTRATION 15
Venus Consoling Love, or Cupid a Captive
Francois Boucher
c. 1751
Chester Dale Collection
Image Source:
Cup

While the Rococo period provided a momentary, superficial diversion from the sobriety of Enlightenment, the brevity of this era demonstrates that this diversion was just that: a brief interlude between more serious human pursuits.

During the eras of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, Christianity slowly but surely moved from the center of human life. Although it still remained an essential element of western society, the influx of scientific rationality diluted the strength of the church. In response, the art of the period reflected this major change. The constant presence of angels in art waned, as other subject matter became more prominent. Also, angels became generally more feminine and childlike, and they increasingly appeared nude or only semi-clothed. I believe this underlines how artists began to de-emphasize and even trivialize the imagery of angels. In the following centuries, the portrayal of angels continued to evolve during the periods of Romanticism and Modernism.

Angels in the Nineteenth Century

In the nineteenth century, the further development of Enlightenment thinking and revolutionary ideas such as Darwin's theory on the evolution of man gave science an ever-increasing role in human life. With this increased role of rationality, however, came skepticism as to the actual value of purely rational thought. Thus, in the nineteenth century, the revival of spiritualism as the antithesis of science gave many doubters a place to express their skepticism while at the same time embracing what they perceived as more illuminating pursuits.

The art, literature, and religious climate of the era all reflect this age of uncertainty. As this section discusses, many images and treatments of angels appeared in art and literature, and the spiritualist and theosophist movements brought spirits that could be seen as resembling angels into the parlors of many people in the Victorian Age. Although some artisans and theologians strongly embraced images and roles of angels in everyday life, much of the culture either ignored angels or treated them in a superficial manner.

Angels in Romantic Arts and Beyond

The period characterized as "Romanticism" in the art and literary worlds lasted from about 1800 until 1850 (Romanticism, 1996). This movement provided a reaction against the realism inspired by the Enlightenment age and produced art and literature that "strives to express by suggestion states of feeling too intense, mystical, or elusive to be clearly defined" (Romanticism, 1996). Romantic painters sought to revive the concept of Medieval romance, through choosing subject matter that incorporated themes of religion and spiritualism, nature, and mysticism and exoticism (Romanticism, 1996). Despite this shift towards the spiritual and supernatural, images of angels appear comparatively infrequently in the Romantic era of the early nineteenth century.

At this time of stylistic changes, artists of the time faced new challenges in political and financial realms. The system of patronage, so well established in the Renaissance, began to erode, forcing artists to look to new sources for support (De La Croix, Tansey, and Kirkpatrick, 1991). And, artists began to call into question the taste of the public as the driving force for subject matter and treatment in their art (De La Croix et al, 1991). These changes led to a "pluralist" approach to art: no longer did one style or subject matter dominate, but individual artists and schools began to carve out niches of their own. Nonetheless, the art of the nineteenth century does provide some insight into the people and culture of the time, and the role of religious spiritualism and angels within this period.

Continuing along the established pattern of stylistic development, artists of the time continued the exploration of secular subject matter that began during the Renaissance. Thus, the presence of angels as an expression of religious tradition continued to wane during these years. Instead, many artists (Delacroix, Ingres) favored portrait painting and depictions of fictional, secular scenes or classics-inspired historical scenes, devoid of any religious imagery such as angels.

Other artists of the time did incorporate spiritual and religious notions into their work, often in tandem with exploration of natural, landscape-type scenery. Philipp Otto Runge, for example, "declared that true art could be understood only through the deepest mystical experience of religion" (De La Croix et al, 1991, p. 882). As De La Croix et al (1991) wrote, "Like William Blake, whose work he must have known, Runge was a religious visionary who believed in angels" (p. 882). Runge's *The Times of Day* (1809) incorporated religious imagery, featuring angels prominently, in a natural setting. His angels appear mainly as childlike cupids, in both "natural" and "supernatural" forms, with an overall "realistic" tone. The work, like others of Runge's, seems to exhibit his belief in the Divine origins of knowledge and life (De La Croix et al, 1991).

While some art of the nineteenth century attempted to create mood and emotion through less realistic styles, other artists attempted to capture the same realistic imagery as the new medium of photography. The subject matter of these realistic paintings, however, focused much more on the natural and the everyday than the supernatural and the transcendental. Of course, it stands to "reason" that angels would not become the subject matter of these realists, which easily explains their absence.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in England in the mid- nineteenth century, however, found a way to merge the realism movement with a reintroduction of medieval themes. As De La Croix et al (1991) wrote, "While using Realist techniques scrupulous to truth and detail, these artists gave full play to their imaginative faculties in idea and content in order to render their subject Romantically" (p. 913). Often, these pictures would feature biblical scenes, including angels, or secular scenes with some sort of religious or moral message.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, usually considered the founder of the Pre-Raphealite Brotherhood, used angel imagery a great deal in his work. His painting of *The Damozel* (1875) shows three images of very feminine angels with wings and haloes, as Illustration 16, below, demonstrates.

ILLUSTRATION 16
The Damozel
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
c. 1875

Image Source: The Damozel.

Several of his other works feature images of Mary, portraying her in an angelic manner, often accompanied by actual images of angels. For example, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848) shows Stes. Mary and Anne at work on a domestic project, with a young girl angel alongside. (See Illustration 17, below.) Mary and Anne sport haloes, giving them an angelic look. The young girl angel is a unique feature of Rossetti's, as other artists usually portray young angels as male, and adult angels as female or male. The realistic portrayal of the angel also differentiates it from other portrayals.

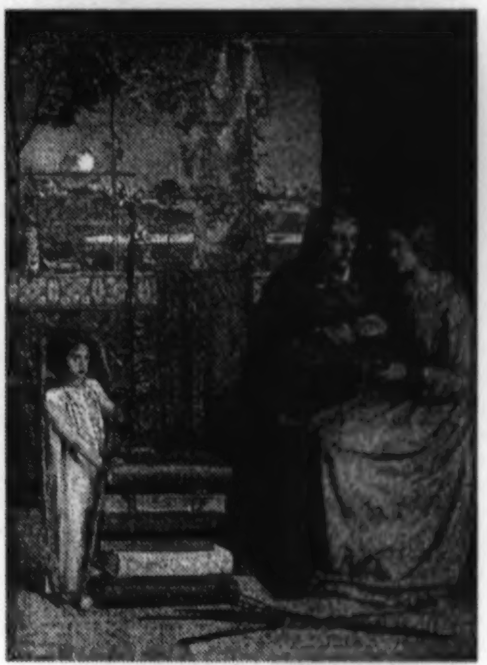

ILLUSTRATION 17
The Girlhood of Mary Virgin
Dante Gabriel Rossetti
c. 1848-9
The Tate Gallery

Image Source:
Gerten-Jackson

In contrast to the realistic style embraced by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the Impressionist school did away with any attempts to realistically portray their subject matter, usually of a natural scene. In doing so, however, they did not adopt mystical or religious subject matter, favoring instead the seemingly endless water lilies at Giverny.

Spiritualism

Spiritualism emerged in the last half of the nineteenth century in Great Britain, the United States, and Europe, and possibly other areas as well. Founded on the "belief that the dead manifest their presence to people, usually through a clairvoyant or medium," it responded in part to Enlightenment thinking, in that it questioned the ability of science to divine truth about everything in the universe (Spiritualism, 1996). This account of the appearance of the dead resembles the general belief in the appearance of angels, who manifest themselves to "chosen people," often to bring a message from God.

As well, it arose in the Victorian and Edwardian age, as opposed to other ages, most likely because of the "idle" feminine class. Oppenheim (1985) noted that women in this age were kept "housebound" by the social convention of the time and may have looked to spiritualism as a means to exit, if only in spirit, the confines of their homes. Of course, many spiritualists were later uncovered as charlatans, but this did not seem to diminish the popularity of this movement during the Victorian and Edwardian ages.

Today, spiritualism still exists, and about 180,000 people in the U.S. continue to practice this brand of religion (Spiritualism, 1996), and spiritualist churches have a presence in Canada, including in Calgary and Edmonton. Though their communication does not exclusively involve angels, spiritualists may seek to contact angels or dead relatives who they may perceive as serving as "guardian angels." As well, the continued belief in "extra-terrestrial" visitation echoes in a sense the roles that angels have historically played in Judeo-Christian theology and life. Thus, the Spiritualism movement, though it waned quickly after it waxed, influenced a good deal of later religion and philosophy, from its own era right up to the present day.

Theosophy and the Theosophical Society

A close cousin to spiritualism, the term "theosophy" has existed since before the common era, though it received its most famed expression in the Theosophical Society of the late nineteenth century. Theosophy refers to "any religiophilosophical system purporting to furnish knowledge of God, and of the universe in relation to God, by means of direct mystical intuition, philosophical inquiry, or both" (Smith, 1996). It has its earliest roots in Sanskrit, Hindu, Persian, and Chinese Confucianism in the east, and Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, and the Jewish Kabbalah in the west (Smith, 1996). Later, in Europe during the Middle Ages and following years, intellectuals and theologians such as Meister Eckhart and Jakob Boehme embraced the theosophic tradition (Smith, 1996).

During the 19th century, Ward (1969) noted that "in the use of angels as symbols, however, a trend [was] discernible in which the pure spirits formerly seen as separated from man by their sinlessness were becoming carriers of a variety of human values" (p. 189). Nonetheless, the symbol of angels remained an important part of human culture at the turn of the 20th century. Ward (1969) observed that a significant amount of books about angels were published between 1890 and 1925 (p. 197). At that time, too, she notes that the Theosophical Society emerged, as a response to the materialism made possible by the emergence of technological advances such as electricity, aviation, and telephony (Ward, 1969, p. 198). Rudolf Steiner, a scientist of European origin, was associated with the Theosophists for a time. Ward (1969) wrote that "angels took a prominent part in Steiner's vision of the universe, as personifications of the external forces he saw at work on human beings, molding directing, influencing them, and even struggling amongst themselves for possession of men's minds" (p. 200).

Rainier Maria Rilke (1875-1926), a poet and contemporary of Steiner, believed angels were internalized by people as unseen forces that people experienced during times of despair (Ward, 1969). Despite the roles of angels as intermediaries between God and Man, and while they were helpmates of man, Rilke's perceptions of angels go beyond syrupy sentimentality to exude quiet strength and power (Ward, 1969).

At the center of the Theosophical Society during the nineteenth century, its creator, Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), also known by a seemingly endless litany of nicknames, popularized theosophy for a time during the late 1800s. Smith (1996) called the Theosophical Society "a small but active international group of occultists who believed in reincarnation as the necessary path to the ultimate, inevitable purification of humanity." Today, they also maintain a fairly active presence on the Internet with "Blavatsky Net," an informational and recruitment website.

According to Goldstein (1998), Blavatsky's brand of theosophism serves as a natural development of spiritualism, which waned during the late nineteenth century. He wrote "what Blavatsky did, essentially, was to introduce into old-fashioned control-medium-sitter spiritualism a vocabulary and a theoretical framework borrowed from Hindu mysticism, the Jewish cabala, and European neoplatonist hermeticism. In so doing, she both reinvigorated spiritualism and made it—at least for a few moments--intellectually respectable" (Goldstein, 1998). The central tenet of Blavatsky's theosophism, according to Smith (1996) is that "God is infinite, absolute, and unknowable (an attribute apparently incompatible with the claim implicit in the term theosophy). The deity is also said to be the source of both spirit and matter." Blavatsky believed that some "beings" have achieved a higher state of consciousness than others, and the purification of lower states of consciousness into more divine, higher states, comes through spiritual incantations (Smith, 1996). These incantations invite spiritual presences into the human realm, which strongly resembles the intervention of angel-spirits as instruments of God.

With Madame Blavatsky at its helm, the Society briefly carved out a place for itself in New York society during the late years of the nineteenth century. Despite this short period of fame, however, Blavatsky has been accused of fakery (Washington, 1996). She claimed that her expertise came from, among other experiences, seven years in Tibet under the masters, and experience with Indian mahatmas (Washington, 1996). Yet, these experiences have not been verified, and Washington (1996) asserted that Blavatsky herself and many of her confidants would regularly make references to her "false prophetry." Despite the dubious character references of its creator, Theosophy still contributes to religious discourses.

The book *Devas and Men: A Compilation of Theosophical Studies of the Angelic Kingdom* (1977) discusses the hierarchy of devas, similar to the angelic hierarchy. The devas hierarchy includes (1) Nature spirits or elementals, fairy-like beings who inhabit the elements of earth, water, air, and fire, and (2) Lesser and higher angels, messengers from God, as the Christian faith, ordered into three hierarchies of three, similar to the St. Thomas Acquinas ordering (Southern Centre, 1977). Theosophy seems to take a less negative stance towards the "fallen angels" than does Christianity, viewing both types of angels as essential to human life (Southern Centre, 1977).

During the nineteenth century, Ward (1969) wrote, angels become further divorced from their religious roots, and they became sentimentalized (p. 177). This sentimentalization occurred concurrently with the exaltation of womanly virtue as pure and demure. Angel imagery thus often appeared intertwined with laudatory commentary on women, or in a metaphorical context to denote goodness, as in the poetry of Tennyson, Browning, and Dickinson (Ward, 1969). At the time, Ward (1969) asserted, "visions, however, were regarded by most educated people as something that occurred only in cases of mental disorder (p. 186).

In the nineteenth century, however, three notable exceptions to the erosion of the strong relationship between angels and their religious roots arose, and these "exceptions" still color the religious landscape of the millennium era. First, Joseph Smith, who allegedly saw the angel Moroni, who appeared in an aura of light to reveal to Smith the truths of Mormonism (Ward, 1969). Moroni appears wingless and masculine in the artistic representation at the Salt Lake City temple, built in the mid-nineteenth century (Ward, 1969). In a similar situation, Mary Baker Eddy, Christian Science founder, generally eschewed images of angels, though she did acknowledge that she perceive angels in a more feminine construct (Ward, 1969). Ellen Gould White's book *The truth about angels: A behind the scenes view of supernatural beings involved in human life*, published in 1996 though written some time during Gould's prolific writing career in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, approached the subject of angels from the clearly religious point of view of Seventh Day Adventism. Despite these exceptions, however, the nineteenth century generally represented a time when angels' presence in culture remained peripheral and trivial on the whole.

Angels in the Turn-of-the-Century Victorian Age

The Victorian Age covered roughly the last half of the nineteenth century and the first few years of the twentieth, coinciding with the rule of Queen Victoria in Britain and the style associated with this historical period. Laver (1973) suggested the taste of this period ran to bourgeois and urban, and focused particularly on the middle class home and its furnishings and "knick-knacks." This Victorian home "represented warmth and comfort, and a shelter from the world" (Laver, 1973, p. 18). It was also a time of patriarchy, in the advent of the Women's Liberation movement, and a time of metaphorical containment for women in their homes (and clothes).

Laver (1973) calls the painting of the Victorian Age "provincial," as well as "moral" with "a good does of sentiment always in danger of sliding off into sentimentality" (p. 97). Advances in printing technology made the mass production of art possible, and the images mass produced usually bordered on the sentimental, with children and flowers as common subject matter (Laver, 1973). Christmas and Valentine cards also became popular, and these featured these same sentimental images, with angels as another prominent subject matter. These angels included chubby cupids or cherubs, naked with small wings, as well as adult women with flowing hair and robes and feathered wings. The bodiless cupid, a head with wings attached, was also a popular image.

In general, the nineteenth century provided a backdrop for conflicting allegiances between the natural and supernatural worlds, in this post-Enlightenment age where people questioned the validity of the assumption that science and reason could uncover all of the mysteries of the universe. In keeping with the "reason" tradition, the presence of angels as an expression of religious tradition continued to wane during these years as many artists such as Turner, Constable, and Monet favored portrait painting and depictions of fictional, secular scenes or classics-inspired historical scenes. Nonetheless, angels did figure prominently in some art, literature, and philosophy of the time. Even Benjamin Disraeli, in a speech on Charles Darwin's Origin of Species, asserted "The question is this: Is man an ape or an angel? Now, I am on the side of the angels."

Art in the Twentieth Century

The historical hindsight that enables us to reflect on the depiction of angels in the past two millennia becomes blurry, however, as we edge closer to contemporary millennium era times. In general, the artwork of the twentieth century in the Western Hemisphere is categorized as "Modern Art," though this category can only be described as a multiplicity of art styles ranging from highly realistic to completely abstract and a multiplicity of techniques and media (Modern Art, 2000). Perhaps "the most important characteristic of modern art is its attempt to make painting and sculpture ends in themselves, thus distinguishing modernism from earlier forms of art that had conveyed the ideas of powerful religious or political institutions" (Modern Art, 2000, p. 3). Thus, much of the art of the twentieth century strays far from the religious themes of the previous centuries and explored subject matter previously considered too abstract (think Matisse), too shocking (think Maplethorpe) or too base in its use of popular culture (think

Warhol). This foray into avantgarde subject matter resulted from social movements such as feminism, intellectual developments such as Freudian psychoanalysis, and scientific advancements in areas such as physics (Modern Art, 2000). What developed from these societal changes included art styles such as Fauvism, Cubism, Expressionism, Dadaism, and Surrealism (Modern Art, 2000).

While religion no longer controlled artists and their work, religious themes did inform some work of the twentieth century. Kandinsky, for example, sought to infuse his abstract work with religious meaning such as apocalyptic themes (Modern Art, 2000). Marc Chagall also included religious and spiritual messages into his work. His painting "The Falling Angel" incorporates a series of Christian and Jewish images that reflect on the impending World War II. His nude female angel, flying upsidedown is depicted as red, with one visible eye and wings, a significant departure from earlier images. (See Illustration 18.)

ILLUSTRATION 18
The Falling Angel
Marc Chagall
c. 1923-47

Image Source:
Gerten-Jackson

Recent decades have seen artists further pushing boundaries and exploring new techniques and technology. "Postmodern" art, if there is such a thing, is thus characterized by a pastiche of styles and images and a breaking down of the barrier between elite and popular art. Thus, we see today images of angels in contemporary art that span the spectrum of realistic to abstract and include angels of every gender, race, even species. The empirical research of Chapters 4, 5, and 6 will seek to categorize some of these representations in the areas of film, material culture, and the Internet. To understand the role of angels in contemporary culture beyond artistic representations, the next section discusses recent academic and popular writings on the subject.

Contemporary Works on Angels

Academic Writing

As previously mentioned, I have found little academic research on the subject of angels and people's belief in angels. Of course, some work on angels exists in fields such as theology (for example, in the form of dissertations that discuss the roles of angels in Biblical books) and art history (for example, in the discussion of religious content in paintings and sculpture). Sociologists, however, have given little attention to the subject of belief in angels, perhaps perceiving it as either in the purvey of another discipline or as inconsequential.

Although my research has uncovered a number of scholarly articles that feature the term "angel" in their titles, the subject matter usually focuses on other topics, so the use of "angel" is metaphoric. For example, an article titled "Too Dark to Be Angels: The Class System Among the Cherokees at the Female Seminary" dealt with racial and class bias, not spiritual beings. Thus, I have identified only a few scholarly articles that exclusively focuses on the subject of angels. Sara Horsfall (1997) has written a paper entitled "Identifying the Spiritual Experience" that discusses angels as one of many experiences that comprise what we call "spirituality" in a contemporary context. Horsfall's paper identified the lack of academic examination of the "subjective" realm of spirituality, and she used an interpretive approach to study spiritual experiences (including angels, Wicca, Marian apparitions, and new religious movements) in a systematic and scholarly way. Lange and Houran (1996) have written on "The Role of Contextual Mediation in Direct Versus Reconstructed Angelic Encounters" in the journal *Perception and Motor Skills*.

In the book world, academics have produced just a few scholarly works on various aspects of angels and cultures, typically on a specific element in disciplines such as literature or philosophy. Gayle Shadduck (1990) published *England's Amorous Angels, 1813-1823*, which focused on five major English poems that featured male angels conjoining with women. Robert Alter's (1991) work *Necessary Angels: Tradition and Modernity in Kafka, Benjamin, and Scholem* drew comparisons between these three figures, particularly their treatments of religion and secularization, including the symbolic presence of angels in their lives. Similarly, Beatrice Hanssen (1997) discussed the symbolic nature of the presence of entities such as angels in Walter Benjamin's writing in her work *Walter Benjamin's Other History: Of Stones, Animals, Human Beings, and Angels.*

More recently, Paul Colilli (1999), a professor at Laurentian University, wrote *The Angel's Corpse.* He suggested that the contemporary portrayals of angels, such as that of *City of Angels* and angel collectibles, have divorced these beings from their divine origins. Instead of their roles as God's messengers, angels have become too secular, according to Colilli (1999). He asserted that this worldly turn began during the Renaissance and has continued to contemporary culture that simultaneously dismisses angels as non-rational apparitions and creates portrayals of angels that are benign or even schmaltzy.

A few earlier books on angels have also been written, but they approach the subject from a different temporal vantagepoint. According to Theodora Ward, author of *Men and Angels* (1969), the presence of angels in modern society has waned. She wrote, "from his stature as a prince of heaven, the angel has diminished in the public eye to a mere decoration, but he is not entirely absent. The kernel may be missing from the concept, but the form has been kept because something in the recesses of the human mind still needs it as a symbol" (p. 4). Ward worked through the Old and New Testaments, as well as touching on other ideas from Zoroastrianism, Gnosticism, and apocryphal/pseudepigraphal texts. An angel is characteristic of monotheistic religions, while other entities (fairies, jinnies) perhaps are part of the polytheistic world. The similarities do not end there, however. Ward (1969) pointed out that "There was considerable resemblance between the angels who were charged with the care of the forces of nature and the nature gods of the religions " (p. 79). Overall, Ward presented a thorough review of the theological treatments of angels, with a scholarly objectivity that eliminates the potential for a specific denominational bias. The book lacks, however, a perspective on millennium-era culture.

In her 1973 book *All About Angels*, C. Leslie Miller says that she wrote the book because books about angels are not being written, while other forms of spirituality (witchcraft, Satanism) are being written about. Miller's work acknowledges the imminent "end times," presumably of the millennium, her work is intended to serve as an antidote to these evils.

Other scholarly books about angels were written in the 1960s and 1970s, and while they make some interesting observations on the history of angels in culture over the last two millennia, they, too, lack the position to comment on angels in culture over the last thirty years.

For example, D.D.C. Pouchin Mould (1963), who holds a PhD from Edinburgh University, approaches the subject of angels in an academic way in her work *Angels of God: Their rightful place in the modern world.* She writes of St. Thomas Acquinas who, according to Etienne Gilson, claimed that angels are real, a fact which can be proven, and that men can be understood in contrast to angels (as discussed in Pouchin Mould, 1963). Acquinas operated on the assumption that angels are real, taking scriptural evidence and the appearance of angels to certain people (Joan of Arc, Fatima) as empirical. Although angels are described poetically and symbolically in scriptures, they must take on more understandable visual forms when they appear to humans (Pouchin Mould, 1963). Although Pouchin Mould (1963) claims that "every man is given a guardian angel at birth" and that "this guardianship takes on a new and more intimate character after an individual is baptized" (p. 17), her lack of citations of this claim make it less rigorous.

Van Der Hart (1972) wrote that "angelology," the theology of spirits, is a subject untouched and almost forgotten. He argued that angels were formerly an important part of Christianity, because the existence of angels helped people explain nature's mysteries, and people could more easily understand angels than the transcendent divinity. He went on to argue that "modern western man is quite alone in his reluctance to believe in angels and devils (p. 17).

A number of other books written about angels might be considered academic texts, but the clear religious biases of the authors raise questions about the objectivity of these works. For example, the text *Devas and Men: A Compilation of Theosophical Studies of the Angelic Kingdom* (1977) is dedicated to explaining "devas," godlike angelic entities in the theosophic tradition, culled from Hinduism. According to the text, a strong relationship between devas and men will enable an understanding between the natural and spiritual worlds. In a similarly biased fashion, while these texts do, indeed, take a generally academic approach to the subject of angels, their inherent bias detracts from their objectivity. Nonetheless, they do provide considerable information on how a particular religious tradition incorporates angels into its belief systems.

Although this literature review has been thorough but perhaps not exhaustive, my research has found a very strong indication that writings on angels that might take a "sociological" focus usually come in the form of popular, rather than academic, works. These books most often present subjective discussions of angels and purported angelic encounters. The following section of the literature review provides examples of the types of writings on angels that have surfaced in popular writing. I have chosen a few representative works as the sheer number of books about angelic encounters and connecting with angels make an exhaustive review of this literature quite tedious, as most books seem to replicate ideas presented in similar books.

Popular Literature on Angels

In the category of popular works on angels, Sophy Burnham's (1990) *A Book of Angels* seems quite popularly read and cited. Her book jacket biography distinguished her as a novelist, journalist, and writer of nonfiction and plays. Some of her writing deals with angels, while other works examine other topics. Her authority on angels appears to come from her own alleged encounter with an angel, as well as obvious, though not obviously academic, research. Though her discussions seem well founded, they lack the thorough citation and argument characteristic of more academic work. Her work combined stories of purported angelic encounters with historical and cultural foundational information about angels.

In a theological vein, Rabbi Morris B. Margolies's (1994) book *A Gathering of Angels: Jewish Life and Literature* demonstrated a more scholarly background than other authors of similarly "popular" books did. A rabbi of 43 years, Margolies currently holds a position as Professor of Jewish History at the University of Kansas, and has a number of scholarly books and articles to his credit. Margolies's work provides an historical treatment of how Jewish texts, ranging from the Hebrew Bible to the Dead Sea Scrolls to Franz Kafka's writing, have discussed angels. While Margolies's work exhibited less bias than did Phillips's, Margolies's exclusive focus on Judaic angels showed a certain subjectivity. Furthermore, his religious background necessitated his uncritical acceptance of the existence of angels, without an objective analysis of this existence. As well, Margolies presented his discussion in a more descriptive, less explanatory, way.

Another theologian, Phil Phillips, was billed as an "internationally-known speaker and minister" on the jacket of his (1995) book *Angels, Angels, Angels: Embraced by the Light...or Embraced by the Darkness*. Phillips (1995) stated early on that he believes in angels in the Biblical sense, and he endorsed the issues of angel art and artifacts. Phillips (1995) took umbrage with this trend, though, when he observed that "angels are a Christian symbol that has been hijacked by the New Age movement" that "flies directly in the face of God's word" (p. 12). This clearly stated bias naturally colors his work, lending it a rather subjective quality.

Andrew Bandstra, a Professor of New Testament, Emeritus, at Calvin Theological Seminary, wrote the text *In the Company of Angels*, using a strictly Biblical perspective. Bandstra acknowledged the devil and demons seem to get more attention than angels, and that it is important (for Christians, anyway) to understand the roles of angels. Bandstra (1995) argued angels, spirits created by God, minister to humans but are not all-knowing or all-powerful. He also mentioned that angels in the Bible are male (referred to by the pronoun "he" and male in appearance). While only two angels are personalized in the Bible (Michael, the angel of Israel who fights evil in Revelation, and Gabriel, the heavenly messenger who appears in connection with the births of Jesus and John the Baptist), two others (Raphael and Uriel) are identified in additional Biblical texts.

A self-proclaimed fan of the previously mentioned Sophie Burnham, James N.

Pruitt's (1995) *The Complete Angel* combined an alphabetized encyclopedia of angels, with reputed angel encounters across the fifty states. Pruitt's (1995) work combined secondary academic-type research for the angel encyclopedia with sociological-style primary research, such as interviews, for the discussion of the encounters. Pruitt (1995) wrote that his time in Vietnam inspires his work, and his previous book, *Angels Beside You*, chronicles alleged angelic encounters during wartime. In his addendum, Pruitt encouraged people, especially military veterans, to write in with their input.

Some popular works on angels written by academic-type authors lack any real academic tone or unbiased objectivity. The brief biography on the back of Janice T. Connell's (1995) book *Angel Power* described her as "an attorney" and "the author of religious bestsellers." The foreword to the book, written by Father Robert Faricy, S.J. lent added religious weight to her work. Connell's work included a fairly comprehensive discussion of terms people have used to categorize angels, though the book focused on how people can attempt to consciously call on what Connell characterizes as "Angel Power." Though the book incorporated a more "popular" than academic tone, Conner's role as an attorney places her in a professional occupational stratum similar to academics. Similarly, Julia Ingram, a counselor/therapist, and G.W. Hardin, an editor with academic training in the sciences, edited the book *The Messengers* (1996). This work narrated the alleged experiences of businessman Nick Bunick , who claimed he has both encountered angels as well as experienced a past life experience as Paul of Tarsus. This narrative-style work included Bunick's description of his supposed present day experiences as well as narrative and dialogue of his purported experiences and conversation with Jesus during a past life.

In contrast to these mainstream Christian treatments of angels, Ted Andrews's (1995) work *Angelic Mysteries and the Divine Feminine* focused on angels in the Gnostic tradition. Although the text centered on the mystic power of angels in the Gnostic tradition, particularly in a feminine sense, it approached the topic from an epistemological standpoint characteristic of Gnosticism. Andrews's biography called him a "full-time author, student, and teacher in the metaphysical and spiritual fields" and mentions his experiences with clairvoyancy, numerology, tarot, and other pursuits loosely characterized as "New Age." Andrews's book provided a foundational discussion that argued that Christ should be characterized as occult, followed by a discussion of angels in relation to the seasons.

Jay Stevenson, PhD (1999) wrote the perhaps irreverant *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Angels*. While the book has an accessible, almost comic, feel to it, it does seem well researched. Stevenson (1999) maintains a fairly objective tone throughout the text by incorporating views from various religious traditions. The text does, however, approach the subject from the assumption that angels are real entities.

While this literature review merely touches upon the vast number of writings about angels, this representative sample does indicate how the existing literature has dealt with the subject of angels. Most writings about angels have taken a popular, rather than academic, approach. And, while these popular works have provided ample information about historical treatments of angels and alleged angelic encounters, they did so in a largely uncritical way. The few more academic treatments of angels tended to approach the subject from a theological or artistic point of view, with little attention to the social and cultural issues relating to angels. Overall, the attention given to angels, sociological and otherwise, by academics and laypersons is biased (by theologians) or partial, descriptive and lacking scholarly rigor (by non-academic writers). Moreover, most popular writers make the ontological assumption that angels do, in fact, exist. This uncritical acceptance of angels avoids a social-scientific questioning of this existence. More importantly for this proposed dissertation, though, is that these studies do not seek to understand why people believe in angels and what this belief means in sociological and cultural terms. This dissertation provides an attempt to fill this gap.

Cross-Cultural Angels

This historical and cultural literature has focused quite exclusively on cultural products of the Western Hemisphere, specifically North America, a natural choice as the focus of this disseration is contemporary culture of this same region. The West did not, and does not, have a monopoly on angelic images in its cultural beliefs and products. Rather, according to Knapp (1995), "In all ancient cultures, winged beings were thought to act as couriers between this world and the next" (p. 8). As well, Burnham (1990) wrote, "Winged spirits—angels—are part of the mystery of every culture" (p. 19). Although they may have overstated the global presence of angels, their comments illustrate that the historical and contemporary popularity of angels is not isolated to North American alone.

Knapp (1995) also asserted that the Greek god Hermes precurses the angels in the Christian tradition. His duties included bringing messages to humans from the gods and settling in motion human encounters. His portrayal as a winged man clearly likens him to an angel. Egyptian sphinxes and Etruscan demons staked their claim on the divide between life and death, and both sported wings. Greek cupids helped to mold our conceptions of angels as winged creatures who help humans experience base emotions such as love (Knapp, 1995). Additional Greek angelic characters include the horae (Burnham, 1990).

Other cultures, particularly eastern, have included angelic characters in significant, ways, too. Balinese culture includes a winged mermaid (Burnham, 1990). The Vikings had their winged Valkyries (Burnham, 1990). In Persia, there are fereshta, peri, or hori, described as "sexless female celestial beings who give sensual delight to the inhabitants of Paradise" (Burnham, 1990, p. 19). The Hindus have their asparsas, heavenly fairies who provide sexual excitement to the gods (Burnham, 1990, p. 171). The Indo-European tradition includes angels that can have children and are not necessarily sexless (Burnham, 1990).

Even earlier, in Mesopotamia, researchers found artistic representations of griffins and the goddess Isis, both featuring wings. In Ur, an early civilization in Euphrates Valley (c. 4000-2500 BC), archaeologists have found artistic depictions of "a winged figure descending from one of the seven heavens of Sumerian belief to pour the water of life from an overflowing jar into the cup of the king" (Burnham, 1990, p. 82). In Hellenic mythology, Isis, Hermes, and Nike all sport wings and act as messengers. Similarly, the Roman tradition has its putti (Burnham, 1990).

Islamic tradition embraces angels similarly to Judaism and Christianity. They serve to guard heaven from harmful spirits. Israfil is the angel of Judgement Day, and the

Angel of Music, Mika'il (Michael) has many faces, many eyes, and many tongues, and he speaks many different languages (Burnham, 1990). Djibril (Gabriel) has the sun between his eyes, and he enters the ocean hundreds of times, and the drops that come off him when he exits become millions of angels that praise Allah (Burnham, 1990, p. 150). Azraeil is the angel of death, similar to Raphael, who has the world at his whims (Burnham, 1990, p. 150). Harut and Marut are similar to Judeo-Christian fallen angels, as they have fallen through sexual temptation (Burnham, 1990, p. 150-152). Malik is the angel in charge of hell, assisted by nineteen angelic guards. In Islam, Isa (Jesus) stands alongside angels and has an angelic type of character (Burnham, 1990, p. 152).

In the Islamic tradition, angels serve as messengers to humans, and they write down the deeds of humans. The angels are created of light, and Satan, demons, and djinns of fire, so they are closely woven together in their constitution. The angels are essentially ungendered, which allows humans some superiority over angels since humans must fight sexual temptation.

Native American culture, particularly expressions of Shamanism, features winged birds, such as the raven, eagle, and crow, that sometimes help humans, such as by delivering divine messages and sometimes harm them through trickery (Burnham, 1990). Ancient Babylonians worshiped a number of deities, including winged bull-men and angel messengers. Later, Zoroastrianism monotheism usurped Babylonian and Assyrian pantheism and the multiple gods became archangels.

Davidson (1967) also noted the cultural similarities of angels, as the same angels figure appears under different names in different traditions. For example, the Judeo-Christian angel Gabriel is called Jibril in Arabic and Gadriel in Ethiopian (p. xiii). This angel, by any other name, would be the same.

As this truncated discussion of cross-cultural angels indicates, angels have historically and currently carved out a place for themselves in religion and culture throughout the world. These cross-cultural angelic beings, however, do not necessarily represent the Judeo-Christian constructions of angels. Rather, these constructions differ from culture to culture. In subsequent chapters of this work, I will make occasional references to these cross-cultural angels, though the focus, of course, remains on North

American culture and its products.

Conclusion

While I have found little academic writing about angels, a multitude of popular texts on the subject throughout history exist, ranging from the Bible to Renaissance painting to today's trade paperbacks about angelic encounters. Throughout the past two millennia, the centrality of religion in society as a whole has affected the portrayal of angels in cultural products. The more central traditional religion to a particular cultural era, the more angelic images resemble Biblical angels. As religion has loosed its hold on our culture, angelic images have become sentimentalized and taken out of their religious context.

Angels in Biblical and related texts were clearly portrayed as non-human messengers and guardians, genderless though more male. They also had a central role in Judgement day. In the early years of the Roman Empire, angels were artistically portrayed with wings and haloes and were generally male, fairly consistent with Biblical portrayals. While angelic images disappeared during the period of iconoclasm, they returned with the rise of Charlemagne. Now, artists portrayed them in Biblical contexts, often with Saints and Mary, and they continued to be presented as male with robes, wings, and haloes.

The Renaissance saw the beginning of the feminization and trivialization of angelic images, now androgynous and peripheral. Cupids and cherubs also became popular as sentimentalized, innocuous angels. This continued in the Enlightenment "Age of Reason," where angels disappeared from many paintings, even religious ones. The Rococo period saw the return of angels, particularly cherubs, though they were childishly portrayed. Feminine angels enjoyed a revival in the Romantic era, especially with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The nineteenth century also saw the rise of alternative forms of spirituality (Theosophy, Spiritualism, and Swedenborgianism) that incorporated angels into their belief systems. Most of the cultural expressions that featured angels had little prominence and thus did not impact the increasingly secular core society, though they did support the move from highly institutionalized religion towards more personal forms of spirituality.

At the turn of the (last) century, the Victorian age had a stronghold on angelic images, through the portrayals were at best sentimentalized and at worst bodiless cupids. Today, a multiplicity of art styles allow for the presence of angels in elite and popular art, but their presence is a fragmented one in a truly postmodern way. To attempt to put these fragments into some meaningful whole, the next three chapters of this dissertation discuss my empirical research on the portrayal of angels in millennium-era culture.

CHAPTER 4: ENTERTAINING ANGELS: SPIRITS IN TELEVISION & FILM

Introduction

As Kirven (1994) wrote:

> Angels are all around us. There can be no doubt about it. Even if you doubt or deny their actual existence, you cannot escape their conspicuous presence in popular movies, best selling books, prime-time television series, major weekly newsmagazines, and other sources. Angels are all around us (p. xi).

Clearly, as this quote illustrates, angels have become a significant part of the entertainment industry, and thus a significant part of this study of angels in millennium era culture.

This chapter begins by outlining some of the angelic and "otherworldly" characters portrayed in film and television, with a brief review of earlier texts and a more specific focus on texts in recent years. Next, it discusses some of the theoretical and methodological elements of researching the media, including discourse and semiotic analysis. Then, it provides analysis of several case studies of contemporary media angels, including the films *Meet Joe Black*, *City of Angels* and *Michael* and the television program *Touched by an Angel.* Finally, it draws comparisons among these four media examples. In particular, this chapter seeks to examine how these television and film case studies construct relationships between signifiers and signifieds in angel imagery in the context of postmodern, secularized consumption. Ultimately, I develop the notion of an "angelic genre," with descriptions of its narrative and semiotic conventions.

Television, Religion & Spirituality

In Chapter Two, I discussed how religion and spirituality has changed markedly in recent decades, resulting in increased secularization in most elements of North American society. According to Hewitt (1993), religious attendance in Canada in the 1990s has dropped to about half the level during the 1940s. Yet films such as *City of Angels* and television programs such as *Touched by an Angel* garner considerable ratings, belying the notion that the importance of religion in people's lives is waning. Instead, as television has become what Celia Tichi (1991) called an "electronic hearth," perhaps the mass media have become to an extent "electronic pulpits," as audiences gather in the postmodern pews of their living rooms and darkened movie theatres.

Some scholars find television generally avoids religious themes in its programming content. For example, Baehr (1997) cited a 1990 study by the American Family Association that found nearly 95% of television characters had no clear religious affiliation and that half of all religious behaviors depicted were negative. Chetwynd (1997) found this natural and suggested that multiculturalism and the presence of many religions in the US make it unwise for programmers to include overtly religious themes, as the inclusion of one belief usually necessitates the exclusion of others. He reported television's formative years, the 1950s, saw a rather monolithic culture with general consensus about values, so religion on television was not a particularly contentious issue. During the 1960s and subsequent decades, however, society became more pluralist, challenging the hegemonic presence of religion in the media (Chetwynd, 1997).

Even when religious programming does find a place on mainstream television programming, some scholars disagree with its treatment. For example, Roof (1997) argued that the media both flattens (by civilizing and softening) and reinterprets (by assessing with cultural trends) religion. Thus, religious programming can erode the core values at the heart of traditional religion.

Perhaps due to the lack of or skewing of religious content on television, some theologians and mass audience members seek to include more spiritual programming in the mass media. Campbell (1997) drew a clear parallel between television and organized religion, calling them "the two most powerful storytellers in our culture" (p. 9). Due to this similarity, and in her position as General Secretary for the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, Campbell (1997) urged religious and media leaders to work together for the "common good" in order to reduce the prevalence of violence and other "undesirable" elements in the media (p. 9).

This movement may prove unnecessary because, as Kieser (1997) claimed, while 94% of Americans say they believe in God, and 41% attend religious services weekly, religion has been curiously absent from broadcast television in the United States" (p. 19).

Recently, however, he noted that "many contemporary series, especially those in the hour category, are delving into the hunger of their characters for spiritual connectedness and they are dramatizing their search for a transcendent ground and spiritual center" (p. 20). This trend may result from changes at both the production and reception moments of the television process.

As well, Medved (1997) suggested that overtly religious people in Hollywood produce programs that mesh with their beliefs. For example, he cited David McFadzean, producer of the family-oriented *Home Improvement*, as an active born-again Christian. As well, he wrote that Steve Spira, head of business affairs at Warner Brothers, observes Judaism and wears a yarmulke each day (Medved, 1997). Martha Williamson, producer of *Touched by an Angel*, is a born-again Christian. While Medved (1997) acknowledged that these religious persons with power can encourage an increased presence of religion on television, this trend may also result from more audience-centered sources. As he quipped, "the profit motive is still more important in the entertainment business than the prophet motive" (Medved, 1997, p. 114). This pithy statement neatly summarizes the collusion between spirituality and the entertainment industry, as exemplified by the case studies discussed later in this chapter. While the producers may have messages they wish to espouse, for broadcast messages to enjoy success with mass audiences, the messages must resonate somehow with the general belief system of the audience. In religion and other areas, "marginal" beliefs of producers won't translate into audience consumption in the same way the more central, mainstreamed beliefs will. Before focusing on these specific cases, the next section briefly discusses the presence of angels and similar characters in the television and film media.

Angels and Other Otherwordly Characters in the Media

As previously noted, society has become increasingly secular, yet religion still retains some semblance of its role as "sacred canopy." The secular and spiritual collide quite notably in popular media such as television, film, and music, where religious themes have a significant, though not always traditional, role. This section etches out some of the examples of how the media portray religion in a contemporary fashion. Although this study focuses most exclusively on belief in angels, the media examples discussed here broaden the field to include other forms of spirituality, faith, and belief and other "otherwordly" characters.

To begin, Doug Bandow (1995) provided a strong argument about the popularity of Christian popular culture, and this popularity can also expand to include other forms of spirituality. Bandow (1995) discussed how religious media products have a significant following among American audiences. He cited research that shows that over a third of Americans say they have read a Christian magazine or book (other than the Bible) "during the past month." Even more impressive, nearly half of those surveyed said they had listened to a radio station playing Christian music (45%) or watched a religious television program (49%) "during the past month" (p. 60). Bandow (1995) argued that this "parallel universe" of Christian media emerged as a response to mainstream media's tendency to ignore Christian issues and ideology. As Bandow (1995) summarized, "Christianity's large, diverse, and thriving subculture demonstrates that the Christian faith means more than church attendance. It is a faith that incorporates political, civic, and charitable activism; it animates artists, businessmen, educators, and musicians. In all these ways, Christianity illustrates its claim to transcendence in believers' lives" (p. 61).

To move beyond the narrower category of Christian spirituality, the television medium has embraced a general belief in angels and other forms of spirits and spirituality. Earlier TV series that featured angel characters include *Highway to Heaven*, starring Michael Landon, and *Teen Angel*, a show aimed at pre-teens. (See Appendix B for a more detailed list of all "Angel and Otherworldly" television programs.)

Angels and other spirits remain popular in contemporary television. For example, in the Fall 1998 season, on the three major US networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC) and two minor US networks (FOX and WB), three shows featured angels, broadly defined. The most obvious, the continuing CBS series *Touched by an Angel*, has a clearly angelic theme, while ABC's short-lived *Cupid* portrayed a character who may be thought of as resembling an angel, a man who (believes he) is the angelic underling Cupid. FOX's (also short-lived) *Brimstone* involved a police officer that tracks down evil spirits, obliquely referred to as "fallen angels." Other shows featured traditional religious themes

(WB's *Seventh Heaven,* CBS's *Promised Land,* and NBC's brief *Trinity* series) or fantasy elements that may border on spiritual (ABC's brief revival of *Fantasy Island* and CBS's *Early Edition*). Several shows feature witches (ABC's *Sabrina,* and WB's *Charmed),* vampires (WB's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the spinoff *Angel*), or aliens (NBC's *Third Rock from the Sun,* CBS's *Stargate,* FOX's *X-Files, Outer Limits,* and *Millennium).* This television trend strengthens the argument that belief in spirits, ranging from angels to aliens, has strongly impacted popular culture. While not all the programs have succeeded in prime time, the fact that *Touched by an Angel* began its sixth season in the Fall of 2000 indicates this impact of angels on popular culture.

Clearly, as this review of television programs shows, media treatments of spirituality can include both "mainstream" and "resistant" features. Family values shows such as *Touched by an Angel* and *Seventh Heaven* espouse more traditional beliefs, while programs geared at other audiences, such as *Charmed* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* present more alternative constructions of belief and spirituality. The quintessential example of spiritual imagery as a form of resistance, Madonna, has infused her music, her image, and her name with religious symbols and imagery for nearly fifteen years. Her signature crucifixes and iconoclastic *Like a Prayer* music video expressed her negotiated use of Catholicism, while the 1998 *Frozen* video illustrated her fascination with Kabbalistic Judaism.

Moving beyond the example of Madonna, in their article "Strange Bedfellows: Symbols of Religion and Sexuality on MTV," Pardun and McKee (1995) acknowledged that generally religious symbols in culture have indicated issues of order and meaning, while at least superficially, religious imagery in rock music seems to have a somewhat contradictory role. They write "rock groups have increasingly embraced religious imagery and symbols in a seemingly ironic attempt to identify themselves, to defy convention, and perhaps to shock traditionalists by placing what have been regarded as sacred symbols into an overwhelmingly secular arena" (Pardun & McKee, 1995, p. 438).

For their study, Pardun and McKee examined 160 music videos, looking for religious and sexual images and the combination of the two. They found that 38% of the videos contained religious imagery, and 62% contained sexual imagery. Most interesting, for them, was that 28% of the videos included both religious and sexual imagery. Specifically, Pardun and McKee found that most of the religious images were Judeo-Christian, with none of the videos including "alternative" imagery such as satanic images. As the media analysis section of this chapter indicates, the parallels between spirituality and romantic/sexuality also appear in television and film.

In moving from the small screen to the big screen, the presence of angels and other spirits expands exponentially, as many films depict belief in the spiritual world as a key theme, whether those spirits be angels, ghosts, or aliens. A number of angel-themed movies were released in the years surrounding World War II, perhaps in response to the possible apocalyptic thinking of the time. Certainly the best known film is the 1946 Frank Capra film *It's a Wonderful Life*, starring Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed and featuring Clarence, a guardian angel sent to show Stewart's character George Bailey why his life is wonderful. Other guardian angel films of the time included *A Guy Named Joe (1946)* and *Angel on My Shoulder* (1946). *The Bishop's Wife* (1947) depicted an angel who came to earth to help a clergyman, and the angel grows quite fond of the clergyman's wife. Earlier, *I Married an Angel* (1942) showed a dream sequence of a man who believes he marries an angel. *Heaven Can Wait* (1943) depicted a man retelling his life to the devil. This brief flurry of angel activity likely occurred as some sort of response to the societal conditions of war, including the apocalyptic possibilities unleashed by warfare.

In the decades following the war, Hollywood released just a few original and remade angel-themed films released. The updated *Heaven Can Wait* (1978) depicted an angel who saves a soul whose body has been cremated; the angel must now find a new body for the soul. *The Heavenly Kid* (1985) involved a child who must become a guardian angel and do good works in order to gain full entry into heaven.

After this period of angelic inactivity, the 1990s saw a burgeoning number of angel films, including guardian angel films *Clarence* (1990), a sequel to *It's a Wonderful Life,* and *Almost an Angel* (1990), as well as *The Prophecy I* and *II* (1995) about angels warring. Angels also helped out in sports-themed films, such as *Angels in the Endzone* (1997) and *Angels in the Outfield* (1996). The 1998 film *City of Angels* (a remake of the

Wim Wenders film *Wings of Desire*) exemplified the spirituality/romance connection discussed earlier, as it portrays an angel who meets a surgeon and subsequently feels compelled to choose between his celestial position and terrestrial love. Similarly, the 1996 film *Michael* depicted a chain-smoking, womanizing, dancing angel who helps a group of tabloid reporters convince the world that angels do exist. Subsequently, *A Life Less Ordinary* (1997) featured two angels working in the background to bring an unlikely couple together. The "darker side" of angelic belief has also seen its share of screen time. The 1998 release *Meet Joe Black* portrayed an otherworldly character, "death personified," who can also be perceived as the angel of death. Likewise, *Fallen (1998)* and *The Devil's Advocate (1998)* portray situations where fallen angels take demonic control of people's lives. More recently, the irreverent "comedic fantasy" *Dogma* (1999) depicted the last descendent of Jesus attempting to prevent two fallen angels, Loki, the angel of death, and Bartleby, from entering heaven.

Other "spiritual" films depict belief in witches (*Practical Magic, The Craft*) aliens (*Contact* and *X-Files*, to name just two), and vampires (*The Last Vampire*). Still others portray general religious themes (*The Apostle*), with a broader focus on religious faith, beyond belief in spiritual beings. Although a great number of films could help support this argument, this discussion represents some key examples of texts that this dissertation examines in more detail in subsequent sections, which detail the media case studies.

While these "spiritual" films have received little academic attention by many scholars, Katherine Fowkes (1998) wrote *Giving up the Ghost: Spirits, Ghosts, and Angels in Mainstream Comedic Films.* Fowkes (1998) suggested that "ghost" films have received little academic attention, due to their overly formulaic nature. Fowkes (1998) argued that the presentation of the male ghost protagonists exemplifies an interesting form of genderswitching. To begin, while women tend to be more gifted at channelling spiritual messages, the film protagonists are typically male. These ghostly characters, though, cannot be seen or heard, much like women feel their invisibility in society. Fowkes (1998) also acknowledged that angel characters in films are constructed somewhat differently, as they seemingly have control over their body and environments, and they can also control other characters. This holds true only while these angel characters remain celestial; when they become human, they experience a sort of powerlessness reminiscent of Fowkes' notion of genderswitching. As well, in the aftermath of death, rebirth renders the characters sexless as they no longer inhabit a corporeal body but the simulacrum of a body. Even the remaking of earlier films echoes this simulation.

Fowkes (1998) also presented a Freudian psychoanalytic interpretation of ghosts and apparitions in films. These films present a feminine narrative, reminiscent of soap opera, whereby the narrative is unresolved, such as when a loved one becomes a ghost or an angel. In a masochistic way, the satisfaction of these ghostly characters means suffering or helplessness, impotence, reminiscent of the Freudian concept of fort-da, or pleasure/pain. Fowkes (1998) also mentioned the cultural forces at work in the construction of these films. In particular, ghostly films serve to "defang" death and dying, and to provide reassurance during stressful times. She noted societal issues such as new age-ism and the interest in eastern religion as similar forces to the angel phenomenon.

To understand one example of the presence of religion and secularization in millennium era culture, I examined several media case studies involving angelic characters. Although Fowkes (1998) has examined spirits in comedic films, she focused on ghosts and a specific genre, while I look for more general narrative themes and uses of angelic signs. Similarly, I focused on films released in a narrow three-year period, 1996 to 1998, and a television program on the air since 1995, to provide a "millennium era" perspective. The next section will discuss each of the four case studies in turn, focusing on the specific semiotic analysis of each media product. For each of the cases, I first provide a short synopsis, along with contextual information about the production of the program, before analyzing the signification at work in that cultural product.

Cases for Semiotic Analysis

City of Angels

The Warner Brothers 1998 film *City of Angels* depicts Nicholas Cage as an angel, Seth, who is attracted to heart surgeon Maggie Rice, played by Meg Ryan. Seth begins to make himself visible to Maggie, accidentally at first. Eventually, they fall in love with each other, despite that she already has a boyfriend and Seth and Maggie cannot be together in a physical or carnal sense. Seth encounters a heart patient of Maggie's, Nathan Messenger, played by Dennis Franz, who reveals that he was once an angel before becoming human. Seth ponders this with his angelic friend Cassiel, played by Andre Braugher, knowing that if he became human, he would miss out on the pleasures of being an angel such as feeling no pain, hearing music in the sunrise, and being able to read people's thoughts. Ultimately, Seth decides that his love for Maggie outweighs the sacrifices he would make by giving up his angelic status, so he elects to "fall" and become human. After facing the initial challenges of becoming human (feeling pain, needing money, etc.), Seth goes to Maggie, finds out she has broken up with her boyfriend, and they spend a glorious night together. The next morning, Maggie wants to help Seth experience the joys of being human, so she goes to the store to buy pears for him to taste. While riding her bicycle back to Seth, she focuses more on the feel of sunlight on her face than negotiating her way, and she is struck by a logging truck and dies. Seth, then, is left on earth with neither his angelic abilities nor the woman for whom he became human.

This film falls into the "major feature film" genre, as a romance/drama or fantasy film. Warner Brothers (whose logo, incidentally, is "WB" superimposed on clouds in the sky, a somewhat angelic image itself) produced the show, and it stars two high-paid actors, Nicholas Cage and Meg Ryan. The film was ranked as the seventeenth highest grossing film of 1998, with $78.9 Million in domestic box office receipts and $198.9 worldwide (Variety, 1999). As the product of a large studio such as Warner Brother, the film clearly had the budget to hire famous actors as well as to create expensive sets and produce extensive aerial shots of Los Angeles.

I selected *City of Angels* as the key case study in my research because of its commercial popularity, demonstrating that it had reached a very wide mass audience in its theatrical release. As well, its theme matched precisely with the aim of this study, as the film focused on angels, people's belief in angels, and spirituality in the post-industrial context. After viewing it the first time, I realized that it portrayed angels differently from other treatments (which often showed humans who die and then become angels) and reflected in many ways traditional Biblical information about angels.

The film, based on the 1988 Wim Wenders film *Wings of Desire* or *Der Himmel Uber Berlines (The Sky Over Berlin)*, uses much of the same storyline and cinematography of the original, though it makes substantial changes as well. *Wings of Desire* depicts two angels, Damiel (Bruno Ganz) and Cassiel (Otto Sander) and their experiences and reflections as they watch over and walk among the people of Berlin. For roughly the first half of the film, there is little "plot." Instead, the film depicts the thoughts and actions of the people of post-war Berlin, including the despair of a youth committing suicide and the despair of the older generation who has lived through the war and its aftermath. In the second half of the film, Damiel begins to be drawn to a trapeze artist in a circus (Solveig Dommartin) as he overhears her ruminating about life. Damiel also encounters Peter Falk (in a cameo role), who reveals he was once an angel. Ultimately, Damiel decides to "fall" and become human in order to experience the banality of human life such as feeding the cat, getting newspaper ink on his hands, and having a physical love relationship with a woman. The film depicts much of the action from an aerial point of view, with the angels atop buildings as they look down on the citizens of Berlin. And, as mentioned, the pace of the film is quite slow, proceeding logically though not linearly in a plot-driven style. As well, the setting of Berlin impacts the film, as this expresses Wenders' hope for the city in trouble and its metaphorical juxtapositioning between an earthly and heavenly existence.

According to Cook (1997), *Wings of Desire* arose, in part, out of Wenders' experience of making the film *Hammnett* and the distaste he had for the tendency for Hollywood films to conform more to the profit-centered vision of the studios and producers and less to the artistic vision of the directors. As well, Wenders' 1985 return to Berlin after a 10 year absence inspired his desire to preserve on film Berlin's juxtapositioning of historical and contemporary struggles related to war and peace (Cook, 1997). *City of Angels*, then, flies in the face of Wenders' original intent, as it is precisely the type of Hollywood film that Wenders sought to critique. The choice of Los Angeles, however, mirrors Wenders' use of Berlin, as both cities face struggles of war/violence and peace, and both function as centers of apocalyptic imagery in different times in recent decades.

Wenders conceived of the scenes of the film independent of the script executed by Peter Handke, with the desire that the narrative exude a poetic flavor appropriate to the angelic subject matter (Cook, 1997). In typical Hollywood films, suturing film elements together allows only a partial view of the action, that allowed by the director, though the audience's knowledge that directors have edited the consuming subject's view creates a sense of desire for "more" (Cook, 1997). In *Wings*, however, Cook (1997) asserted that through Wenders' use of innovative camera angles and movement to depict the vantage point of angels, "instead of intentionally arousing anxiety, the film puts the spectator at ease" (p. 168). This includes such elements as aerial shots, long unedited sequences, and fluid camera movements across and through spatial boundaries. Instead, Cook (1997) sees the freeflowing, fragmentary scenes in the first part of the film as creating a desire for a narrative flow in the remainder of the film. The audience can begin inserting their own experience (i.e. of spirituality) in place of the film's absent narrative. Through *Wings*, Wenders mounts " a response to what he sees as a mass media industry that threatens to engulf all narrative within a medium of images and words appropriated for advertising and commercial ventures" (Cook, 1997, p. 181).

City resembles *Wings* in many ways, including the roles of Damiel/Seth and Marion/Maggie and Cassiel. The angelic characters are quite similar in both films, but in *City of Angels*, the trapeze artist has become a heart surgeon. This implies a need in the North American context for a rationally oriented character to challenge her beliefs about the supernatural and about angels, whereas the more fanciful trapeze artist would be constructed in the Hollywood version as a much less credible source. The character of Peter Falk resembles Nathan Messenger, the character Dennis Franz plays, as both portray angels that have become human. While Falk and Franz both have substantial reputations for playing detectives (*Columbo* for Falk and Sipowicz on *NYPD Blue* for Franz), the construction of Peter Falk's role as a cameo adds a different variable. At one level, it shows Wenders' desire to include American influences in his film, perhaps to show Berlin moving into a world without The Wall. Furthermore, it adds a curious note of realism, as the audience is asked to believe that *Columbo* himself was once an angel, which may account for his uncanny crimesolving ability. Finally, the settings for the two films are similar, as well, as both show angels atop high buildings and listening to people's thoughts in the library.

Most of the differences in the two films rest on *City of Angels* reconfiguring of a German "art film" into a feature film that would enjoy commercially popularity with a North American as well as international audience. To enjoy substantial commercial success, the Hollywood version must play into broad audience expectations more clearly than the German version did. The narrative structure of the film, issues of "star power," and the filmic techniques, for example, needed to become more "mainstream" in order to increase the likelihood of the film's success.

To begin, the choice of internationally known stars such as Cage, Ryan, and Franz demonstrate the audience expectation of major stars in a big budget studio film. As well, *Wings* includes several different languages, which becomes challenging for the more unilingual English-speaking American audience. The use of black and white and color in the films is quite different, in addition. Wenders uses black and white to depict what angels see and color to depict the human vantage point, a comment about the richness of human sensation. The only black and white scenes in *City,* however, occur when Seth is "falling." Finally, the design of the plot changes from *Wings* to *City.* Wenders constructed a literate, philosophical film that included a traditional plot only in the latter part of the film. Silberling, on the other hand, created a more plot-driven film throughout, with a clearer narrative structure interrupted occasionally by fragments of philosophical musings by humans and angels. North American audiences would expect a feature film by a major motion picture company such as Warner Brothers to present a fairly linear plot, and keeping to this formula expectation helped to insure the film's commercial success. As far as the plot itself, *Wings* ended with the first face-to-face meeting of Marion and Damiel in a dance club, and the audience is not shown what becomes of their relationship. This open-ended state allows the audience to fill in possible endings (e.g. they live happily ever after), a uniquely happy ending uncharacteristic of Wenders but demonstrating his hope for Berlin. It also allows for the non-sequel sequel *Faraway, So*

Close! to show Cassiel trying his hand at falling, just as Damiel before had done (Cook, 1997). *City*, on the other hand, does show Seth and Maggie consummate their relationship, but rather than leave the happy ending alone, the film also depicts Maggie's death.

Classified in the genre of "fantasy," the film does not represent character and themes in a "realistic" sense. I believe, however, that, acknowledging the *Time* Magazine poll result that 65% of Americans say they believe in angels, many viewers in the North American context will take all or part of the film to have a realistic representation, in line with their own beliefs. In terms of the positioning of the product in the "major feature film" genre, the choice of a male lead as the angel makes sense. A big box-office draw such as Nicholas Cage helps anchor the success of the film. Female stars, even ones as financially commanding as Meg Ryan, rarely star alone in feature films, as they usually appear alongside a male lead. While producers could have selected Ryan for the role of an angel, despite Wenders' original screenplay depicting a male role, I believe that casting a male in the angel role was an attempt to make the angel appear more human as Cage's character stood for the "generic he" meant to symbolize both sexes. Casting Cage as the angel allowed for Silberling to objectify him in the filmic structuring of the story. As well, casting a male made the sexual desires of the angel more appropriate. In casting the angel as male, Silberling not only remained true to Wenders's vision; he also reflected the traditional Judeo-Christian construction of angels as more male.

One of the central dualities of the film involves the oppositional relationship between good and evil, characterized in particular between the good works of angels and some humans and the evil doings of some humans. As well, the duality between science and faith is demonstrated in the film, as the logical thinking embodied by the medical profession as a whole becomes challenged for Maggie as she encounters faith and spirituality in her dealings in the operating room and her relationships with Seth and Nathaniel Messenger. For example, early in their relationship, Maggie shows Seth a drop of blood under a microscope. Seth asks her if cells are all that make people human, then when they die, it's "the end." Maggie replies that she thinks so, prompting Seth asking her to explain "the enduring myth of heaven." He then asks her why people cry, and once again she cannot give an adequate medical explanation. This dichotomy illustrates the tension between religion and secularization at work in millennium era society.

The choice of heart surgeon for the career of Maggie Rice is important because as a doctor, she serves as a paragon of rational thought in our culture. Her disbelief in angels coincides with this rational perspective, and her change in belief later in the film demonstrates that even a scientifically minded surgeon can embrace spiritual "truth." As well, as a heart surgeon, she literally holds the essence of her human patients in her hands when she operates.

These key dualities come to life in the narrative structure of the film, governed by the central storyline of romance. One of the key syntagmic structures in our culture is "Boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl in the end," and this story becomes played out in the *City of Angels* story. At the conclusion of the film, however, Maggie's death and Seth's ensuing life without her, disrupts this common structure, and it also disrupts the typically commercially successful happy ending. As well, it resembles another formula, the "Gift of the Magi" story, when both members of a couple secretly give up their prized possessions in order to buy a present for the other partner that somehow complements or completes the now sold prized possession. Seth gave up his angelic status to be with Maggie in a human form, but she gives up her human form (albeit inadvertently) to take on a more celestial position. Thus, Seth cannot be with Maggie as she is no longer alive, and through dying Maggie cannot be with Seth because he is no longer celestial.

Like *Wings* before it, *City* portrays angels as real creatures that the audience ought to believe in as a central modality claim. Although the film might fit the "fantasy" genre, viewers are asked to believe in angels when watching the film or at least suspend their disbelief. As well, the film portrays the notion of an angel wishing to become, and indeed becoming, human as a plausible situation. To create this belief in its viewers, the film depicts situations where angels intervene, coincidences to the non-believer, or the presence of angels to the believer.[26] For example, viewers see an air-traffic controller distracted from his work, and an angel helps him focus in order to avert a disaster. As well, throughout the film, we hear angels reading the thoughts of people, and these thoughts might be typical of viewers' own in similar situations. For example, the angels read library patrons' thoughts, which range from a young man's thoughts about the best way to meet the person beside him to a young woman's psychological ramblings about what would happen if she just started screaming to break the silence of the library. The film also addresses an issue of angels and modality that has appeared in other popular culture works, the notion that after they die, people can become angels. In the early scenes of the film, Seth escorts a young girl "home" after she has died, and she asks if she will become an angel. Later, Cassiel and Seth discuss the issue and insist that angels "were never human."

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[26] The angels in *Wings* are less likely to intervene, as evidenced by the scene that depicts a young man committing suicide while the angels observe without interfering.

City relies upon Western cultural assumptions about angels, rooted in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, most familiar to a North American audience. For example, the film makes assertions about angels' gender, origin, and roles. Specifically, angels are portrayed as predominantly male, and as beings very separate from humans. When Seth reports to Cassiel that the little girl he accompanied during her death asked if she could be an angel, Cassiel replies "They all want wings." Seth responds that he never knows what to say, and Cassiel tells him "Tell them the truth. Angels aren't human; we were never human." These assumptions, while they reflect traditional Judeo-Christian writings about angels, belie more contemporary portrayals of angels as female (think, in particular, of Christmas angel collectibles) and formerly human (think guardian angels). Perhaps this reflects a desire to return to traditional beliefs espoused in Biblical texts, a turning away from more modernized "New Age" conceptions. Similarly, the film reasserts the Biblical roles set out for angels, that of messengers, special guardians of children, and companions in death. Thus, in many instances the film supports traditional Judeo-Christian relationships between signifier and signified. In other ways, though, the film constructs more contemporary, secular sign relationships.

The film illustrates several times the special role children have in angels' earthly incarnations. The opening sequence of the film depicts Seth comforting a dying young girl. The film also depicts children as being able to perceive angels, unlike adults. A toddler in a stroller sees Cassiel, for example, and several angels play with hospitalized children. Messenger's granddaughter, Hannah, is able to sense Seth as an angel when she tells him "You're just like grandpa" and "Listen...I'm growing." When Seth "falls," the montage of scenes includes several shots of children and a pregnant woman's abdomen. Finally, Seth's angelic inspiration allows Maggie a restful night of sleep, after when she awakes refreshed to the realization that she now knows the reason for a hospitalized infant's constant crying.

In a particularly contemporary vein, the film also constructs the desirability of human life in terms of the joyful banality in everyday life. When the little girl dies, for example, she tells Seth that her favorite thing about being alive was pajamas. Similarly, the "Band Aid" jingle that runs through Maggie's head during heart surgery and her sensory focus on the pleasure of eating a pear delineate the importance of minutiae in her life. Seth and Cassiel, in their discussions, reveal their envy of these human experiences, such as "tasting water...lying...smelling her hair." Even Seth's final reflection mirrors this, after Cassiel asks him "If you'd known this would happen, would you do it again?" Seth replies "I would rather have had one breath of her hair, one kiss of her mouth, one touch of her hand, than an eternity without it." The fact that these banal experiences are unavailable, and desirable, to angels underlines the film's message that human life is worth living, a message of hope in a potentially apocalyptic time. Perhaps the lionizing of the everyday serves as a counterpoint to the critique of a contemporary society the film subtly presents. By focusing on the joy of these banalities, the film draws attention away from larger societal issues. Early in the film, the viewer sees and hears snippets of people commuting in their cars, ruminating about affairs and other worldly issues. The film also depicts a hold-up, showing the violent side of LA life. Further, in a humorous scene, a medical technician drops a copy of *People* magazine into a "hazardous waste" bin. This contrasts with the exaltation of the public library and the more angelic area of literature, such as Seth's use of Ernest Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast* to draw Maggie into the library for a "chance" encounter. Even "happy coincidences," such as an air traffic controller narrowly averting disaster, are due less to the responsibility of humans and more to the touch of angels.

To turn to the more specific elements of angelic portrayal, the film uses few of the traditional angel symbols (wings, halo, white robes) and pairs these signifiers and signifieds in unconventional ways. The angels wear highly human garb, black trench coats and black clothing, not the typical virginal, innocent white choir robes. This attempts to make the film more plausible, also reflecting the Biblical notion that angels can masquerade in human form. As well, they have no visible haloes or wings, though the trench coat may serve as wing symbols as they flap out behind the angels as they walk. In Seth's falling scene, for example, the trench coat flaps and waves gracefully during his descent, a clear parallel to angelic wings, though these wings don't enable him to fly up.

Although the angels do not wear haloes, they are often bathed in a golden glow of light, reminiscent of the artistic nimbus. For example, when someone takes a picture of Seth, he appears as only a glowing light in the photograph. The light sometimes appears to originate in the angels themselves, though usually the source of the light is more environmental, such as the sunlight that illuminates the angels when they gather at the beach to hear the music of the sunrise and sunset. Similar to the use of light to depict angels, bright light is often used as symbol of heaven, shown as Seth escorts a little girl "home" and when the angels gather on the beach at sunrise/sunset to listen to the music.

Additionally, bright light is occasionally used in the film in the human context. For example, when Maggie is operating and she leans over to talk to a patient, a surgical light behind her head provides a glowing halo of sorts, perhaps making a parallel reference between her job as a cardiac surgeon and the spiritual occupations of the angels. As well, in the final scene of the movie, the human Seth has accepted his lot in life and runs into the ocean joyfully. The last image of the film shows Seth in the water, looking heavenward with his face bathed in light. This symbolizes the very fragile distance between humans and heaven, a distance bridged particularly well through the activities of angels.

In terms of the specific symbols of the main angel character, Seth's nonverbal communication changes significantly after he becomes human. While still an angel, Seth moves gracefully and purposefully. Upon becoming human, he appears ill at ease as he experiences the banalities of everyday life, such as scalding himself with very hot shower water. In order to demarcate the boundaries between humans and angels, the camera shots used in the film try to depict the vantage point of angels, as the camera often begins from above and moves downward, as if moving from the angelic to the human. There are many extreme closeups of Seth as well as Maggie, to allow the viewer a clear look at their facial expressions.

Like the visual elements that characterize angels, the verbal symbols used in the film are often quite vague, oblique, or euphemistic. The word "angel" only appears once in the film, when Seth and Cassiel discuss a dead girl's wish to become an angel. Instead, no clear verbal references are made to the angels' roles, though they are equated with being messengers at several times, such as in Messenger's surname and Seth introducing himself to Maggie as a messenger. As well, the word "heaven" is not used, except when Maggie and Seth talk philosophically. Rather, when Seth escorts the dead girl "home," that is the chosen euphemism. This nondenominational reference would likely have the widest acceptability in the mass audience of the movie.

The names in the film are also symbolic, at both deep and superficial levels. First, "Seth" means "appointed one," an appropriate moniker for an angel, and also the name of a key angel in the Gnostic tradition (Davidson, 1967). As well, this name will translate easily into the human realm, unlike the more angelic "Damiel" of Wenders's film. (The suffix –iel denotes an angelic moniker.) "Maggie Rice" is similar to the name "Meg Ryan," as both share initials and an Irish heritage. This may indicate that Ryan was the choice of the screenwriters to play Maggie, and that the character was written with her in mind. As well, "Maggie," of Greek origin (thus appropriate for a logically oriented doctor) means "child of light." "Nathaniel Messenger" is obviously symbolic because the surname "Messenger" is an alternative meaning or definition of the word "angel" While "Nathaniel" means "Gift of God," it is also the name of an angel in the Jewish tradition.

To summarize, *City of Angels* portrays the angelic characters with few expected markers (haloes, white robes, and wings), using instead more nuanced visual and verbal codes. The angels seem quite human and they express (and at times, act on) the desire to experience human life. The roles of the angels essentially involve serving as spiritual intermediaries between the human and divine worlds, an active role that involves influencing human activities and accompanying people from life into death. While the roles of angels are signified in fairly traditional ways, the characterizations of the angels exhibit less traditional significations, indicative of the increased secularization in contemporary society.

Michael

Like *City of Angels, Michael* features an angelic main character interacting with human characters. *Michael,* however, is a comedy while *City* is a more dramatic fantasy/romance. Warner Brothers Studios produced *Michael* in 1996, making it part of the major feature film genre. Its stars, John Travolta and Andie MacDowell, help give it this status, and brief appearances by legendary stars such as Jean Stapleton help as well. Produced and directed by Nora Ephron and Delia Ephron, it earned a total of $95.3 Million internationally (Variety, 1999). The soundtrack, advertised just before the film on the videotaped version, features songs from artists such as Don Henley, Aretha Franklin, and Bonnie Raitt.

The film revolves around three tabloid reporters, Quindlen (William Hurt), Huey (Robert Pastorelli) and Dorothy Winters (Andie MacDowell). Quindlen and Huey, as well as their dog sidekick, are dispatched by their editor to investigate the story of an angel living with an elderly Midwestern woman (Jean Stapleton). Dorothy joins them as a newly hired angel expert to ferret out the story. They arrive at the elderly woman's home, she introduces them to the archangel Michael (John Travolta), and soon afterward, she dies. The three reporters then conspire to bring Michael back to New York and the tabloid headquarters. Michael insists they take the trip by car, and he proceeds to chainsmoke, dance, and womanize his way across the country with the three reporters in tow. During their adventures, the reporters learn more about Michael, and he teaches them about themselves. As well, Quindlen and Dorothy begin to fall in love. As the trip continues, the skeptical reporters begin to question their assumptions that Michael is a hoax, culminating in Michael's resurrection of the dog after a fatal traffic accident. Towards the end of the trip, Michael begins weakening and tells the group that he doesn't have much longer. Before they can enter the tabloid offices, Michael collapses and fades. The trio returns to their editor, tell him Michael was a hoax, and Quindlen quits his job. The three separate and go about their daily business, with coincidental sightings of words and images of angels. Finally, Quindlen and Dorothy "coincidentally" meet up, and he proposes and she accepts.

I selected this text because it provides a clear example of the characterization of an angel in a film, and also because of the general commercial success of the film. As with other films of this genre, Michael arose out of a North American context, so the symbols and signifiers would resonate most strongly for North American audience members. For example, although the film is, essentially, an original screenplay, it includes a key storyline that follows the classic "boy meets girl" formula.

The chief duality in the film involves faith and secular skepticism. The choice of a tabloid newspaper, representative of an adversarial press, symbolizes the secular skepticism that characterizes contemporary Western culture. The reporters' skepticism, which could also be described as a search for truth, is challenged by the notion of faith that Michael represents. This duality demonstrates the ongoing tension between religion and secularization present in postmodern society.

The film also develops the notion of modality as the narrative story unfolds and the reporters drift from their skeptical search for the truth to their belief in Michael, which rests upon faith. The film constructs the character of Michael as a "real" angel through the words and actions of Michael himself and Pansy. The reporters' skepticism and, in particular, Quindlen's assumption that Michael is a hoax, serve to create a competing notion of reality. The film constructs the reporters' shift into believing Michael is a "real" angel as parallel to the expected audience reaction. At the beginning of the film, the audience, like the reporters, will likely display some skepticism about faith and angels. The film attempts to challenge this skepticism, replacing the desire for "truth" with the desire for "faith."

Another duality is the juxtapositioning of the traditional and modern in terms of religion. The reporters and other people they encounter expect a traditional angel, reflective of Biblical portrayals. They expect Michael to be "cleaner, "blonde," asexual, and to wear a halo. Instead, he smokes, drinks and eats heartily, uses coarse language and looks for opportunities to consort with women. For example, early in the film one of the reporters wants to see how Michael's wings are attached, and Michael suggests to the reporter "Why don't you pull on your pecker and see how it's attached?" He dances, quotes the Beatles, and, when Quindlen asks him why angels don't solve big problems, Michael tells him that angels prefer instead to do "small miracles." Rather than advocating a solemn reverence for religion, Michael tells the group "You've got to learn to laugh; it's the only way to true love." He does demonstrate some traditionalism, though, when he mentions that he threw Lucifer out of heaven and he wrote Psalm 85. This modernizing of traditional religion makes it perhaps more desirable to the postmodern consumer, whohas a number of options to fulfill any spiritual needs.

Michael's appearance particularly reflects his modernized portrayal. The first sight of Michael shows him in boxer shorts, with long hair and a pudgy stomach. Although he doesn't have the usual cherubic appearance and halo, he does have a long, full set of feathered wings that frequently shed. This may work as some sort of phallic symbol, which loses its potency as Michael's time on earth runs out. The next spot of Michael, still in Pansy's farmhouse, shows him shirtless in overalls, with wings sticking out behind. When the reporters take him on the cross-country trip, they outfit him in shirt, tie, and dress pants, with a long overcoat to hide the wings. One feature of Michael's portrayal uncommon to Biblical and other references of angels is his smell, described variously as baking cookies or cotton candy. Dorothy refers to the smell, saying that it gets stronger when he's in heat. Overal, Michael's nonverbal communication, in particular his movements, portray a character very much at ease in the human realm. He moves smoothly, especially when he dances, and displays a high level of comfort, though not necessarily finesse, in everyday human activities such as eating.

The verbal signifiers used in the film include liberal use of the word angel and archangel. The overt use of these words helps delineate the ontological construction of Michael as a real archangel right from the beginning of the film. In comparison with other producers, the creators of this film seem more self-reflexively conscious of their assumption that the audience will come to see Michael as a real angel throughout the course of the film. In turn, they seem less inclined to pander to the potential in the audience to be less than comfortable with religion and angels, as compared to *City of Angels*.

In addition to the modernizing of Michael, the film attempts through comedy, soundtrack, and film techniques to make Michael the angel lighthearted. Songs such as "Chain of Fools" allow Michael to poke fun at humans, and he also pokes fun at other angels who use their miracles for stupid things. When the group embarks on their cross-country trip, Michael wants to while away the time with a game of Car Bingo.

Michael also displays a zest for life that his human counterparts don't display. When the group drives on the open road, Michael insists they stop to see tourist attractions such as the world's largest ball of twine and the world's largest nonstick frying pan. At one point, he fights with a bull in a pasture and even though he loses, he tells Quindlen that he is "completely happy." He also tells them "it's my last blast. Twenty six; that's all we get." Further, one of his key reasons for wanting to become human is that he "craves the pleasure of another." Everywhere Michael goes he encounters women and they stare at him and appear to be very attracted to him. He brings one waitress back to his motel room and though the camera doesn't show a "sex scene," her cry of "Wings…Far out!" leads to the idea that Michael's time on earth was not completely celibate. Sexual experiences provide a very strong motivator for Michael to enjoy his last earthly visit. Unlike the Biblical fallen angels who came to earth to have sex with women, however, the film constructs this as a natural, jubilant part of Michael's identity that doesn't carry any heavenly punishment.

Michael's roles on earth are somewhat atypical symbols of angelic roles. The initial impetus for his presence on earth, helping Pansy with her financial problems, is typical of angelic intervention to assist people. Pansy tells the group that Michael cast out Lucifer, and he modestly tells them "that was a long time ago." She reminds him, however, that he "smote a bank" for her just recently, after the bank foreclosed on her land after her husband's death. The fact that he stays on earth long after he has helped Pansy indicates that he remains there for other reasons as well. He reveals to Quindlen, cryptically, that Quindlen is the subject of a bet that allowed Michael to come back to earth. He also functions to help people, specifically Quindlen and Dorothy, open up about themselves and try to become better people. He insists that Dorothy sing one of the songs that she has written, and she sings about lost love and having angels watch over her. He also demands that Quindlen apologize to Dorothy for hurting her feelings, clearly against Quindlen's intentions. In discussing his roles with the group, twice he says, "that's not my area," indicating that angels serve particular functions and that their powers are limited. Ultimately, one of Michael's roles is to get the group to believe in him (and, by extension) spirituality and God. He does so by bringing the tabloid mascot, Sparky, back to life after a car hits Sparky. At the end of the movie, Michael, returned to full angelic status and therefore no longer visible in the human realm, executes a number of seeming coincidences that help reunite Dorothy and Quindlen. At the conclusion of the film, Michael says to Pansy, "let's go home," and the camera shot dissolves into two bright starts in a dark night sky, indicating "home" as a euphemism for "heaven."

Michael's "disintegration" becomes increasingly stronger as he moves further from the Midwest and closer to New York city. The Midwest Bible belt symbolizes a culture that embraces religious belief more strongly than the more secular metropolis. The Midwest affords more of an opportunity to embrace organic and mundane activities such as seeing the world's largest ball of twine, waxing on about the homey and patriotic significance of pie and playing car bingo. The city, which headquarters the tabloid, becomes the site of Michael's departure from earth.

The choice of John Travolta as the lead character Michael resulted most likely from his status as a known box office draw that could ensure a reasonable amount of commercial success for the film. The character had to be male, as he would portray the archangel Michael, and he had to be considered attractive to women to properly fill the role. The lead had to be filled by a very masculine actor, however, rather than a more androgynous one, as he would be quite rough around the edges, with poor table manners and a propensity to swill beer. The role of Michael also involved dancing, for which Travolta is well known from his earlier roles in *Saturday Night Fever* and *Grease*. Whether the dance scenes were created before or after the casting of Travolta is unknown. Finally, the casting of Travolta as the Christian archangel Michael is notable because of

Travolta's publicly stated adherence to the Church of Scientology. While the "religion" of Scientology claims not to be incompatible with the Christian faith, its status as a sect or cult goes against the traditional underpinnings of Christianity as "the one true faith."

In summary, the comedic *Michael* portrays an angel with traditional underpinnings, yet with an especially modern appreciation for the pleasures of human life. While Michael does have long, feathery wings, he hides them under a trenchcoat for most of the film. Thus garbed, he drinks and dances his way across the Midwest, enjoying the company of women while spouting off theology. Along the way, his chief role as a helper of humans becomes entrenched with this subtle goal of convincing his skeptical companions that angels such as he really do exist. His embrace of the pleasures of the human experience serves as a reminder to his companions of the desirability of human life. As well, this moderized portrayal of the archangel maps out a relationship between the signified "angel" and a sexualized, vibrant character as a signifier.

Meet Joe Black

On the surface, the title character (Death personified) in the film *Meet Joe Black* may seem an unlikely comparison for the purely angelic films *City of Angels* and *Michael.* The similarities among these films, and especially the "other worldly" main characters, however, makes this comparison highly appropriate.

The Universal Pictures 1998 film *Meet Joe Black* depicts the well liked, respected, and extremely wealthy media tycoon Bill Parrish just before his sixty-fifth birthday as he experiences a heart attack in the middle of the night. Parrish, a widower who fondly remembers his passionate love with his wife, has a close relationship with his daughters Susan, a physician, and Allison, a socialite, preparing to throw Parrish a gala birthday party, as well as with Allison's husband, Quince, who also works for Parrish's company. Parrish seemingly has everything a person could want. Thus, although his time has apparently come, "Death," personified in the character Joe Black, barters a few more days added to Parrish's life in exchange for a tour of the human world with Parrish as his guide. "Death" has not experienced life as a human being, so through his enfleshment as Joe Black, he experiences worldly pleasures ranging from tasting peanut butter to courting Parrish's daughter, Susan, who earlier met the young man whose body Death inhabits in a chance meeting at a coffeeshop. Parrish's business, a communications conglomerate, is undergoing a merger with Drew, Susan's fiancé, at the helm. Parrish resists the merger, though, on the grounds that it will corrupt what he has worked so hard to build. Ultimately, Parrish executes the takedown of Drew and brings a halt to the merger, saving the company in the form he created it. He cannot, however, stall Death accordingly, and so he must go to "the other side" after his birthday party. In a happy twist, as Death takes Parrish, the handsome stranger Susan met in the coffeeshop returns from the other side.

As a film from Universal Studios, *Meet Joe Black* is part of the "major motion picture" medium. This high-budget positioning enables the film to include lavish sets, a renowned Academy Award winning actor such as Anthony Hopkins (Bill Parrish) and a prototypical handsome heartthrob to play Death (Brad Pitt). The genre of the film lies somewhere between romance and drama, with a bit of comic relief thrown in.

I selected this text for analysis because of the similarities between the character of Joe Black with Seth, of *City of Angels*, and Michael, of *Michael,* in order to compare and contrast these characterizations. Although Joe Black is the incarnation of death, the film portrays him as a humanized version of death, much as Seth and Michael become humanized versions of angels. Thus, they all portray "otherworldly" creatures. And, the personification of death might also take the form of the "Angel of Death," in line with the Biblical notion that as God decides who lives and dies, the "Grim Reaper" or "Angel of Death" serves as God's messenger and companion to dying people. Finally, I selected this film because of its commercial success, as it grossed US$44.6 Million domestically and US$134.3 internationally, ranking it in the top thirty grossing films of 1998 (Variety, 1999). As well, at a budget of approximately $80 Million, including a reported $17.5 Million for Pitt, the film has substantial commercial importance (Pandya, 1999). This financial backing, coupled with the starring of actors such as Pitt and Hopkins, make this film a very "Hollywood" production. Thus, while the film may have received mixed reviews from film critics and scholars, it has the potential of reaching a large mass audience domestically and internationally.

Although an "original film," like many films, *Meet Joe Black* repackages an earlier story. In this case, the film remakes the 1934 film *Death Takes a Holiday*, based on a 1920s stage play by the same name. As well, the film was remade in the 1970s for television. The recent remake, although it reconfigures the story substantially, allows a new, wider audience to experience the story. Most contemporary filmgoers would not know about, much less have access to, a copy of the "original" film, so this updated version retells the story for a more contemporary audience. As with many remakes, though, critics lambasted this film for its retelling of the story. First of all, *Meet Joe Black* includes a modern-day media conglomerate merger, not part of the story. As well, it ignores a major storyline of the original, the impact of Death actually taking a holiday and thus bringing no end to illness and suffering during this holiday. And, while the original ends with Death taking his ladylove with him, the remade version went with a "Hollywood ending." While the aging Parrish does apparently die in the end, the young man who Susan met in the coffeeshop returns to life, presumably to continue the relationship consummated when Death inhabited the young man's body.

Central to the film are oppositions and dualities typical to North American culture. First of all, the notion of good/evil has a presence, though in a rather oblique way the film constructs Death for the most part as winsomely innocent, with few references to negativity. More apparent in the film is the opposition between death and life/love. I use these two terms collectively because the usual polarity of death is life, but in *Meet Joe Black*, the line between life and death becomes blurred as Parrish receives a few extra days of life-before-death, which might also be categorized as purgatory. The demarcation between death and love comes to the forefront, as death separates Joe Black and Parrish from who they love.

Like *City of Angels*, a key modality claim in *Meet Joe Black* rests on the belief in or suspension of disbelief in spiritual beings. While the issue of death is a certainty, not an opinion, the film assumes the audience believes that death would want to experience life as a human.

The syntagmic structure of the film has little of noteworthiness. It follows the predictable "boy meets girl" narrative, and the remade ending presents a reasonably happy picture. As well, the protagonist predictably wins the business conflict. And, though Parrish does perish at the end of the film, this happens after he acknowledges that he has had everything he could want out of life. The return of the young man from the coffeeshop, and the departure of Death, restores order to the film at its conclusion.

Throughout the film, verbal signifiers are used quite pointedly. Of course, the term "angel" does not appear in the film, but the word "death" does in a few places. Death himself, however, does not utter the word; instead, he prods Parrish's character to "name him" as first Death and then Joe Black. After Parrish identifies him as "death," though, he recants this by saying "You're not Death, you're just a kid in a suit." Of course, the name "Joe Black" is hardly accidental, either. The creators chose "Joe," which means "God adds," for its normalcy and its generic humanity, evidenced in Allison and Quince's reaction after their introduction. They both say they like the name; "it's so solid," she says. Later, Susan comments that he's "just a regular Joe." And, of course, the choice of "Black" for a surname reflects Death's morbid occupation. Likewise, Parrish's surname echoes the word "perish," which, after all, he is about to do. The Parrish given names (Bill, "resolute guardian;" Allison, "noble and kind;" and Susan, "Lily") all reflect a WASPish normalcy befitting their status as upper crust, wealthy easterners. Allison's husband's name, Quince, reflects more whimsy, also reflected in Quince's slightly comic role.

Beyond these verbal signifiers, nonverbal codes include elements such as facial expressions, facial appearance, clothing, touch, movement and posturing, and environment. All of these work both independently and collectively in films such as *Joe* to create symbolic imagery, in conjunction with the verbal dialogue as well.

The environment in a film with an $80 Million budget can include very lavish scenery, and the *Meet Joe Black* sets seemingly spared little expense in creating an opulent environment for the wealthy Parrish family members. The family's helicopter that shuttles them from their weekend home to the city evidences the wealth they have at their disposal. As well, it emphasizes the isolated location of their country home, and when it takes family members Parrish, Susan, and Quince, leaving Allison behind to attend to party preparations, it shows a clear separation between the public and private lives of the Parrish clan.

One key environmental element that surfaces throughout the film involves the preparations for Parrish's sixty-fifth birthday party, orchestrated by Allison. The lavish party preparations include many signifiers of wealth, including a 20-piece orchestra. The party environment symbolizes chronological transitions: on the surface, Parrish is transitioning from middle to later adulthood, but for Parrish the transition comes to symbolize from life to death. While we might assume that a man such as Parrish would live an active life following this benchmark birthday, the audience shares Parrish's knowledge that this birthday will be his last. Thus, the film equates age with death, especially in contrast to the "young man" whose body Death inhabits and the youthful Susan just beginning her career in medicine. Perhaps for this reason the film clearly paints her as Parrish's favorite daughter, equated with the son he never had.

The less lavish yet nonetheless formal environment of the three family dinners depicted in the film also show the opulence of the Parrish family. The dinners take place in Parrish's three-story penthouse "apartment," and each dinner features elegant place settings and tableware. The penthouse itself shows artwork on the walls, and elegant furniture throughout the house. Parrish's library has floor-to-ceiling shelves, and the penthouse also features a spacious private swimming pool for the family's use.

Another form of nonverbal communication, haptics, involves the way people use touch to communicate nonverbally. With the Parrish family, touch is used extensively to communicate their affection for one another. The family hugs and kisses one another at virtually every meeting, even though they see each other frequently (every day in the case of the time shown in the film). In one segment, Parrish kisses Susan goodbye, and this action is parroted by her fiancé, Drew. Thus, we come to see Drew as an Oedipal simulated father, yet still clearly second to Susan's real father. Another particularly telling use of touch is the first interaction we see between Susan, the favored daughter, and Parrish when she playfully punches the arm of her father. This illustrates their easygoing relationship, and paints Susan as the more aggressive and masculine daughter.

Similarly, kinesics refers to body movements and how they communicate nonverbally. Actors often take on physical characteristics different from their own when they go "into character." For example, costumers fitted Anthony Hopkins with expensive suits for his part of Bill Parrish, yet when shooting began, the clothes no longer fit properly because Hopkins adopted a sway-back position in order to play Parrish (Universal, 1999). As well, Brad Pitt changed his movements when playing the two characters, the young man in the coffeeshop and Death incarnate. As the young man, his posturing was a bit slouched and casual (reflected in his clothes as well) yet when he played Death he adopted a stiffer demeanour, to reflect Death's apparent discomfort inside a human body.

In another example, When Susan meets the young man in the coffee shop and he asks to buy her a coffee, they add cream and sugar and stir their coffee in a mirror image of each other, instantly showing their compatibility. As well, after they part ways, they both walk away with occasional looks over their shoulders, mimicking each other and showing their desire for further contact. In addition, when Parrish feels chest pains at his office, the camera moves in for a close up to show his pained expression, and we hear a barrage of voices that sound like Parrish's own. After the episode, Parrish remains kneeling in his office, as if in supplication to the power that commands his pain and the voices he hears.

Clothing serves another crucial nonverbal element of a film's production, and it reflects a great deal about characters through the choices the costumers, Aude Bronson-Howard and David Robinson, made. For example, the clothing worn by the two Parrish sisters illustrated the contrasts in their characters. Allison wears detailed, dressy suits and costumers chose a flowing emerald-green satin ball gown for the birthday party. These outfits delineate her character as a socialite, as her clothes are designed for fashion, not function. Susan, in comparison, was outfitted with casual, practical elegance, such as in khaki pants and sleek suits. This carves out her identity as a hard-working doctor. As costumer David Robinson said, "We dressed her to capture a distinctive look of youth, simplicity, sincerity and class that's essential to the character" (Universal, 1999). As well, her clothing changed during the course of the film, reflective of her relationship with Joe Black. At first, her outfits are neutral colors like the young man in the coffee shop, and then she wears more black, mirroring Joe's name and clothing choices. In the party scene, she wears a simple gray beaded sheath evening gown, which emphasizes her youthful sexuality.

The title character, Joe Black, also undergoes costuming changes throughout the film. In the coffee shop, the young man wears a rumpled suit with a loose tie, reflective of his exuberant southern charm. Later, when Death inhabits his body, Joe Black chooses black suits with white shirts and black ties. This somber outfit reflects both his name and his position. As well, Susan notes during the film that he always wears the same clothes, which puzzles her. As the *Meet Joe Black* website notes, "Brest wanted a distinct look for Pitt's two personas: the nameless young man Susan Parrish meets in the coffee shop; and the similar looking but very different Joe Black. Explains Bronson-Howard: 'Marty wanted slouchy, wrinkled clothing for the young man while Joe Black had to look sharp and sleek. Joe's clothes are all straight lines'" (Universal, 1999). When Joe dresses after his first night at the Parrish residence, he has selected a black suit with white shirt and black tie. He has difficulty with the tie, having no experience with human clothing, and Parrish helps him tie the tie in a fatherly gesture. This further paints him as a surrogate son of course, underlined by Joe Black's role as Susan Parrish's suitor.

In keeping with these costuming choices, Joe does not have the usual codified indicators of an angel, which is hardly surprising, or even the angel of death. His funereal black suit and lack of wings contrast with the expected portrayal of an angelic character in flowing white robes and wings and haloes. He is portrayed, however, as an object of beauty, as the camera shows many extreme close ups of his face.[27] As well, during his first meeting with Parrish, the camera paints him in a quasi-religious manner, silhouetted through the glass before he reveals himself completely. At the close of the film, his ascension, both alone and with Parrish, construct him as a companion to those who ascend to heaven. Thus, he becomes more an angel of death than the devil or an entity who causes death to happen.

Overall, Joe's nonverbal bearing shows a certain discomfort, as his posture is quite stiff and his movements show a measure of formality. He appears mystified with the basics of dining with his uncertainty about issues such as using silverware and passing the rolls. In contrast, when he goes into the kitchen and encounters the servants, he appears slightly more comfortable. This comfort grows again when he first tastes peanut butter, which he eats with a spoon. After his first try, choking on the peanut butter, he develops a liking for it and eats it several times throughout the film. His discomfort with the formality of the family dinner with all its pomp and circumstance contrasts sharply with his affinity for peanut butter spooned straight out of the jar, a considerably more prosaic comestible. This illustrates a preference for simple pleasures over expensive luxuries.

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[27] This, of course, may have little to do with the directorial choices in creating the film and more to do with the fact that the actor is the "uberhandsome" Brad Pitt.

Verbal codes also inform the semiotic sign systems that create *Meet Joe Black*. Early in the film, Parrish expresses his concern to Susan that she is not "swept away" by Drew, expressing Parrish's very romantic vision of love. While she (a rationally oriented physician) makes light of the idea that she should wait for this ideal love, Parrish encourages her to keep her mind open to the possibility, as "lightening could strike." In a subsequent scene, the young man Susan meets in the coffee shop uses the same phrase, demonstrating the potential for their relationship and also creating an Oedipal parallel between Susan's father and suitor. This Oedipal parallel seems more intellectual and coincidental than the parallel drawn between Parrish and Drew, which seems more superficial, artificial, and affected.

The verbal messages that only Parrish hears mark that "something is wrong," which viewers anticipate will be more clearly expressed later in the film. The voice he hears, however, is his own. It sounds like him and, in one scene, repeats his prior conversation with Susan as he expresses his wish that "I want you to get swept away. I want you to levitate, to sing with rapture and dance like a dervish." Later, he hears the voice say, "I'm waiting outside the front door," which plays on the expression "death's doorstep."

In the scene when he comes face to face with Death for the first time, he hears his own voice telling him that "yes" is the answer to his question; the question, he discovers, is one he posed during his episode: "Am I going to die?" In this scene, Parrish's voice gradually blends with Joe's as Joe is hidden in an alcove of the library. The scene looks religious, as all the audience can see is Joe's silhouette in the glass. Eventually, Joe comes into Parrish's view, and Parrish understands that he is Death. The twinning of their voices indicates that Death, if not God and angels, is reflected and constructed through Parrish's own identity. Later, the maid comes to ask "Will the gentleman be staying for dinner?", on the surface an offer of hospitality yet perhaps a playful intertextual reference to the cinematic question "Guess who's coming to dinner?"

Joe's use of language simultaneously illustrates his discomfort with the human form he inhabits as well as his underlying power. At first, he hesitates in social situations, and many of his contributions merely mimic the person to whom he speaks. Some of his responses are quite cryptic; for example, when asked about his relationship with Parrish, Black tells the family that "We have an arrangement now."

Visually, the film fades to black at a few points, illustrating a dramatic end of a sequence before a new sequence fades in. The first fade-to-black occurs after the first scene that shows Parrish experiencing an episode of chest pains as he hears voices. This contrasts sharply with the next scene that fades in, the party preparations and the morning rituals of Parrish and his daughters. Later, the film fades to black after the young man in the coffee shop apparently gets hit by a car, just after meeting Susan. The crash scene is almost cartoonish, as it depicts the young man narrowly missing being hit, immediately after which he is thrown in the air by another car. Clearly, this fade to black illustrates the "death" of this man, the last chapter of his life. The next scene to fade in is one of the formal dinners with Parrish and his family, the first scene where Death takes over the young man's body.

Beyond the dialogue and visual construction of the film, the music in *Meet Joe Black* shows pacing and lays the foundation for certain audience reactions, usually emotional. For example, the music is a dramatic staccato beat when Parrish experiences his chest pains, echoing the precarious beating of his heart. As well, the film is punctuated with long silences with no music, between dialogue and also during characters' conversations. When Joe Black experiences the human condition, much of the music reflects a childish innocence and playfulness.

Beyond these specific codes, the film presents a number of meaningful exchanges that combine sets of visual, verbal, and musical signs to create more detailed sign-systems. First of all, Parrish and Joe walk slowly as they approach Parrish Communications, though we see people rushing around them. This visually suggests that Parrish's encounter with Death forces him to slow his hectic pace and focus on more meaningful aspects of life. Parrish asks Death about dying people while Death "takes a holiday," and Death likens his multitasking ability with Parrish's in a commentary on the postmodern condition. This departs from the original film, where the lack of death to bring an end to the suffering of disease and war shows the negative implications of death taking a holiday. As well, when the Jamaican woman dies, we see that, indeed, death can take people while he is on holiday.

Later, in an extension of this conversation, when contemplating the Bontacue offer at the board meeting, Parrish discusses the virtue of his business, giving news, compared to the monopoly that Bontacue would establish which would be motivated entirely by profit. After this speech, Drew, who has presented the Bontacue offer as the only sensible path for Parrish Communications to take, says that joining Bontacue is "every bit as certain as death and taxes." Black replies that this is an "odd pairing," with his lack of knowledge of the human condition. Later, though, this juxtapositioning of terms takes on a humorous tone when Black purports to be an IRS agent after uncovering Drew's betrayal of Parrish.

After the board meeting, Parrish asks Black to leave him alone for a while, and after a brief exchange (Parrish gives Black some money, saying "You know about money?" to which Black replies "It can't buy happiness.") Black takes a walk, ending up in the hospital where Susan works. He encounters an elderly Jamaican woman, who fearfully recognizes him as Death. He speaks her language and reassures her that it is not her time; he is merely "on holiday."

After Joe returns to be with Parrish, we see him eating a cold lamb sandwich, which prompts Parrish to rhapsodize about his late wife, who served him these sandwiches. Although Parrish appreciates the sandwich because it is "more tender than roast beef, not as boring as chicken," the notion of Death consuming a sacrificial lamb sandwich subtly portrays his darker side. As well, one reviewer noted that Parrish's affinity for lamb sandwiches mirrors another character played by Hopkins, the cannibalistic Hannibal Lector in *Silence of the Lambs.* (Source unknown.)

Throughout the film, Joe begins to replace Susan's fiancé Drew as a figurative son to Parrish. Drew feels affronted by Joe's usurpation of his prior place as "number one," as Parrish introduced him when Black first came to dinner, and Joe exacerbates this disliking by revealing his knowledge that Drew cheated on a French Philosophers' exam. Parrish, too, exacerbates this uneasy relationship when he tells Drew that Joe will make the final decision about the deal. Drew's distrust of Black is countered by Quince's easygoing acceptance of Joe, without any evidence of feeling threatened by Joe's place in Parrish's life.

Overall, Quince is portrayed as a very agreeable character, comically so. When Parrish reminisces about his daughters, Quince murmurs "I love little girls," which garners strange looks from the family. Quince also becomes a sage, later in the film, when he gives advice to Joe. Joe joins Quince for a pre-party drink and asks him how he knows he loves Allison. Quince tells him that "She knows the worst thing about me and she loves me anyway," which parallels to the worst thing about Death that Susan could know: his true identity.

Several times in the film, Parrish requests his family's presence at meals, and these dinners provide elaborate constructions that provide a way to share food and companionship during what Parrish knows are his last days. At dinner the second night, Joe says to the family "Susan's a wonderful doctor," to which Drew replies "I'm sure she is," indicating he has never bothered to gain first-hand knowledge of his fiance's professional life. At this dinner, Susan wears a black suit (skirt and jacket) with a white shirt underneath, indicating her growing affinity for Joe Black. That night, she attempts to grow closer to him, though he ignores her advances and goes to bed. This, of course, is a reversal of the typical gender roles where the male pursues the female.

The film treats gender issues in a relatively traditional way overall. The human males in the film—Parrish, Quince, and Drew—dominate the business aspects of the film. Allison is portrayed as a stereotypical wealthy woman, focused on parties and clothing. This portrayal is not negative, through, as her focus on the party comes out of her love for her father and her desire to create a truly memorable evening (unbeknownst to her, his last) for him. She remains kind and friendly throughout the film, happily accepting the societal role she has, apparently, consciously chosen for herself. Her sister Susan, in contrast, has chosen another lifestyle in her career as a doctor. This career choice is the more masculine one, though the emphasis on her caring manner over her medical skill mediates this portrayal. Also, her choice of a career in medicine rather than the family business places her profession outside of that of the men in the family. The portrayal of Joe Black is a bit of an enigma, in gender terms. While he is domineering, as Death is wont to be, he also seems the naive innocent in the sexual context, where Susan takes the initiative.

At dinner the third night, Drew does not appear, after the secret board meeting to which Parrish was not invited. Clearly, Joe Black has taken his place as "number one," a surrogate son and paramour of Parrish's favorite daughter. During this dinner, there is a short but sharp conflict between Allison and Parrish as he grows frustrated by the importance she places on the details of his party. It resolves itself quickly, but this demonstrates the strains of their relationship. After dinner that night, Susan and Joe have a romantic encounter that begins as she approaches Joe by the pool and asks to kiss him. Since this is death's first kiss, he appropriately reveals that the kiss gave him a weak feeling in his knees and made his heart beat faster, both indicative of his romantic arousal. He also says "the taste of your lips and the touch of your tongue; that was wonderful." This encounter begins poolside, equating the water with sexuality and fertility. The music during these scenes is mischievous and playful, a variation on the romantic leitmotif. They move from the pool area to a bedroom, where Susan undresses herself and then Black. She wears black lingerie, and then lies on the bed, offering herself to Black. The love scene consists entirely of extreme close-ups of Susan and Black's faces, with special focus on the apparent wonderment of Death experiencing sex for the first time. Afterwards, Susan comments that "I loved making love with you. It was like making love with someone who was making love for the first time." This paints her as more sexually experienced than the bodily innocent Death. She plays on his naivete again when she prods him "Do you like making love with me? More than peanut butter."

Following Joe's sexual initiation with Susan, Parrish becomes angry at how Death has taken over his life. Joe firmly puts Parrish in his place, which leads to Parrish approaching Susan to ask her to end the relationship with Joe. Although she reminds him that she sees Joe as the "passion" and "obsession" he wanted her to have, just like Parrish's relationship with his own wife, and that part of the reason she loves Joe is that Parrish seems to rely on him so much. He insistently tells her, however, that Joe is not good for her and she rather meekly acquiesces to his wishes.

Later, Joe tells Parrish that he loves Susan and that he plans to take her with him, but Parrish tries to talk him out of this, insisting that taking anything you want isn't love if it hurts the one you love. Parrish then says "multiply it by infinity and take it to the depth of forever and you will still have barely a glimpse of what I am talking about." This repetition of Death's speech (regarding the power of Death) equates Parrish's belief in love as equal to Death's belief in death, emphasizing the key duality in the film. Parrish implores Joe that he has become a good person during his time as a human and that he knows it is wrong to take Susan.

When Joe sees Susan later, he asks if he can kiss her, a shift in roles from their initial sexual encounter when Susan did the asking. He kisses her and she says she feels them "lifting off," an expression of their ascension, and he replies that he is still there, though she says "but you're not." He tries to tell her his identity and tries to make her guess his identity, but all she says is "you're Joe." Clearly, she is unwilling, if unconsciously so, to acknowledge his true identity. She prefers instead to see him in an entirely positive light.

Later, back in Parrish's office, they confront Drew and Joe reveals himself as an IRS agent investigating the Bontacue takeover. When Drew scoffs at Joe, Joe says, "Should you choose to test my resolve in this you will be looking at an outcome, a finality that is beyond your comprehension. And you will not be counting the days or the years but the millenniums in a place that has no doors." This equates death with prison, at least for Drew. The music we hear in the background is "Anything goes," a rather lighthearted counterpoint to the confrontation.

Parrish goes to the party and gives a presidential-style wave to the assembled guests (reminiscent of Nixon, a character played by Hopkins in an earlier film). He wishes that they have a life as lucky as his own, commenting that he doesn't want anything more. The band plays "What a Wonderful World," reflecting Parrish's knowledge of his impending demise. He has already said goodbye to Allison earlier in the day, when he apologizes for not being the same father to her as he was to Susan. He now approaches Susan to tell her how much he loves her, saying goodbye, and her tears reveal that perhaps she knows on some level that this goodbye has a finality to it. He asks her to dance, wondering if she would "like to dance with an old fogey," and she replies presciently that "you're not old; you'll never be old."

Joe asks a passing waiter for peanut butter, which is not available at this black-tie affair, and symbolic of the end of Joe's time on earth. He walks up the stairs and sits and watches the dancing, as Susan and Parrish part he feels tears on his face. Parrish then ascends the stairs, thanking Black for his time with Susan as Black thanks Parrish for the time he has given him. Parrish tells Black that "it's hard to let go, isn't it" but "that's life, what can I tell you?" The music swells, and Black and Parrish walk over the stairs together. Parrish asks "Should I be afraid," and Black replies "Not a man like you." This construction of Parrish's death as essentially positive emphasizes that good people such as he have no reason to fear death. Susan sees them go over the stairs and runs toward them, seeing Joe return over the stairs alone.

She asks him "Where did you go?" and he says, "I don't know." His mannerisms and speech have lost the "Joe Black" stiffness, replaced by the casual ease of the young man in the coffee shop. He offers no explanation for where he has been, and they talk of their meeting in the coffee shop. She tells him "I wish you could have known my father" which indicates that she must realize on some level that this is not the same entity with whom she has recently spent time. They hold hands and walk back to the party, with fireworks exploding in the background. This ending provides for the audience a modicum of sadness at the passing of Parrish, but retains the happy ending that Hollywood audiences crave when the young man returns to continue, presumably, the relationship with Susan. As well, the comeuppance of Drew effectively removes him from Susan's life, making room for her new suitor, and allows for the preservation of

Parrish Communications as an immortal legacy of Parrish. As the credits roll, the band plays "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," indicating Parrish's new celestial position.

In general, the semiotic construction of the character of Joe Black reveals a relationship between signifier and signified unique from, yet at times similar to, the characterizations of Seth and Michael. *Meet Joe Black* creates Death (or the Angel of Death) as an altogether likable character, despite, or perhaps because of, his funereal black suits and awkward behavior in social situations. In general, Death appears very human, desirous of tasting the ranges of human experience from peanut butter to Susan Parrish. His role as Death also has a positive spin, as he takes only those whose time has come and gives back the body whose time had not yet come. Of course, the role of "angel of death" occurs for both Seth and Joe, and Joe, like the other two characters, is constructed as sexual and enthralled, yet ill-at-ease, with the minutiae of human life. He differs from the more "traditional" angelic characters in that he takes a more forceful and aggressive stance with the human characters and does not merely serve as a messenger or helper. For the most part, though, the signifiers work collectively to signify this "angel of death" as powerful, yet innocent, charming, and desirable. Thus, the signifier/signified relationship "defangs" death, an appropriate construction for the potentially apocalyptic millennium era.

Touched by an Angel

The television program *Touched by an Angel* features three angelic characters who are "dispatched from heaven to inspire people who are at a crossroads in their lives" (CBS, 1999). The cast includes Roma Downey, who portrays Monica, an angel learning how to help humans, and Della Reese as Tess, a more experienced angel who helps guide Monica. John Dye joined the cast in the show's third season as Andrew, the Angel of Death who also performs other earthly duties to assist humans. The show also features a new slate of human characters for most episodes, though some characters have occasionally reoccurring roles.

The show debuted in 1994 on CBS, and the cast and crew film the show in Salt Lake City under producer Martha Williamson. Williamson's credits also include

Promised Land, a spin-off of *Touched* that follows a family in their cross-country journey in a motor home in search of personal and spiritual fulfillment. *Promised Land* began when angels visit the family and are "asked to help redefine what it means to be a good neighbor and recapture the American dream" (CBS, 1999). Since the debut of *Promised Land* three seasons ago, the two shows have on occasion featured crossover storylines.

Like other dramatic and comedic television programming, *Touched* follows a prescribed formula for each of its episodes. In my observations, this formula prescribes the narrative structure as such:

- A "teaser" allows the audience to meet the people the angels will help and to establish what the angels' case will involve.
- The angel(s) interact with their cases, which requires taking on various disguises.
- The people involved in the case behave in an unspiritual manner, which leads to an imminent catastrophe.
- An angel (usually Monica) reveals herself and averts the catastrophe. The angel brings the tearful message "God loves you" and helps the person come to accept the word of God and correct their unspiritual behavior.
- The angels fade out of the case.

Producer Martha Williamson (1997) supported my case when she writes of a plaque on her wall:

> The Angel Formula: The angel meets her assigned human at a crossroads in his or her life. The angel (by the power of God) performs a miracle to bring that person to a point of decision or revelation. He or she, by his or her own free will, then takes life-changing action. (p. 34)

For this study, I selected four representative programs from the 1998-1999 season. While each had a unique plot, all followed the formula described above. (See Appendix C for detailed plot synopses of each episode in the study.)

Although *Touched* is an original program, unlike *City of Angels* and *Meet Joe Black* that remake existing texts, it does demonstrate intertextual awareness, similar to other programs in the television medium and the drama genre. Particular episodes may be inspired by or similar to other examples of popular culture such as other television programs, films, books, etc. A particular example of intertextuality with *Touched* comes in the form of its spin-off, *Promised Land*.

In semiotic terms, *Touched* makes a clear and specific Christian modality claim: Angels are real, and they are a tangible manifestation of the word of God. Although the individual stories presented in the program may have clear fictional elements, such as Tara Lipinski, Olympic gold medalist, playing the part of an Olympic hopeful, the producer and the stars have stated unequivocally their own belief in the reality of angels as expressed in the program (Williamson & Sheets, 1997). Further, by juxtapositioning the presentation of angels as real alongside actual current events situations, the program's creators further shore up the desired audience notion of the reality of angels and, by extension, God. For example, the program featured an episode on the issue of school violence that was scheduled to air just following the episode of violence at Columbine High School in Colorado. The decision to postpone the airing of the episode earned significant media coverage, and thus emphasized the presence of real-life issues in this fictional context.

Similar to the film case studies, the central (if unoriginal) opposition in *Touched* is between good and evil, or more specifically between right and wrong or spirituality and secularity. The people assigned to the angelic caseworkers are generally not "evil;" rather, they have lost a clear distinction between right and wrong and have not fully embraced the power of God's love. Thus, the angels demarcate the oppositional relationship between secular, often selfish, behavior and spiritual behavior.

Certain symbols function consistently throughout the episodes of *Touched* in this study, as well as in episodes outside this study. Since the angels' central role is to bring people the word of God, their actions center on preparing people for this message. To do so, they disguise themselves as a variety of different people in order to move alongside of their cases. Although the angels do not focus much on their enjoyment of human life, they do express some pleasure, such as Monica's enjoyment of coffee. In general, the angels' clothing and accessories are very human, and they do not include haloes, wings, or robes. This allows them to pass in the human world.

Another iconic symbol is the use of light auras to surround the angels when they appear on screen but do not appear visible to humans. As well, this light appears when the angels reveal themselves and the word of God to their cases. This light glows like a nimbus around the angels' heads, and serves as the demarcation as the angels move from their human disguises to their fully angelic roles. It resembles the artistic nimbi present in visual representations in much art, particularly pre-Renaissance painting.

A particularly important iconic symbol of the program is the dove that appears in the title sequence and the closing credits sequence of all shows. As well, the dove often appears in other parts of the program, particularly in the last scene where the angels complete their cases and dissolve away. For example, in one episode, the dove appeared as part of a poster that the angels passed in a hallway as they exit the human realm. Doves have both religious and secular symbolism, such as a symbol of peace. According to Williamson:

> CBS wanted to know what was intended by the flight of the dove at the end of every episode. Was it God? Was it the Spirit of God? Was it something "religious"? I told them it was a nice way to put a signature on the series. A symbol of peace. They liked that. To paraphrase Freud, sometimes a dove is just a dove" (Williamson and Sheets, 1997, p. 32).[28]

As previously mentioned, disguises serve as a crucial way that allow the *Touched* angels to walk among humans and interact with them before revealing themselves as angels and revealing the word of God to their cases. The types of disguises the angels take on can encompass virtually any occupational or societal role. The angels have appeared as officers of the law, homeless persons, and IRS agents. The symbolic significance of these disguises reflects the Biblical quote which inspired the title of this dissertation: "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: For thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2).

In general, the portrayal of the angels in *Touched by an Angel* resembles the portrayals of the angelic characters in the film case studies, though the main characters in the film are male and the main characters in the television show are female. The casting of Della Reese, an African-American actor, is the only example of a non-Caucasian angelic character in the case studies. Other "angelic" films, however, include non-Caucasian actors playing angels, such as Denzel Washington in *The Bishop's Wife* and *Fallen,* Chris Rock in *Dogma*, and Danny Glover in *A Life Less Ordinary*. To my knowledge, few if any non-African-American and female actors have taken on angel roles. As the next chapter on material culture will reveal, this racial distribution roughly resembles the racial distribution of the field of angel collectibles.

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[28] Williamson continues on to say "Sadly, our first dove never got to episode six. Roma released him into the sky one day for an inspiring moment of symbolism and suddenly out of nowhere, a hawk symbolically swooped down and attacked him. Right there. On film. I heard that outtake is still making the rounds in editing ropms around Hollywood" (Williamson and Sheets, 1997, p. 32).

The disguises that the *Touched* angels willingly adopt in order to fulfill their mission of revealing the word of God shape the characterizations of the angels, as they must become nearly human to walk alongside "unaware" humans. Thus, these angels do not have the traditional angelic trappings (haloes, wings, etc) demonstrated in earlier visual representations and are only marked by a glowing light when they reveal themselves or when they wish to be invisible. This subtle, yet effective, symbol of their divinity creates images of these angels with a great deal of humanity. These pairings of signifier and signified create a highly traditional, Christian representation of the angels clearly derived from New Testament discussions of angels.

The Angelic Genre: An Emergent Possibility

The case studies discussed in this chapter fall into a number of genre categories, from television to film, and comedy to drama. Despite these differences, however, I believe there are striking similarities between the essential narrative structure and symbolism in all of the case studies. Though these similarities cross the usual demarcations between genres, I propose that an "angelic" genre or, perhaps more appropriately, a sub-genre, has begun to emerge in the television and film media. This subgenre works independently from the medium or typical classifications of genre to reveal a new category of popular culture in the millennium era context.

Hartley (1994) asserted that "genres are agents of ideological closure—they limit the meaning-potential of a given text" (p. 128). Thus, genres become a means through which producers of cultural texts can meet the expectations of their audience, by creating texts that the audience has already, on a macro level, given their approval. While genre may constrain producers to create products only within a certain parameter, the producers know that the consumers already have the tools to decode the text within a certain range of meanings. Genres also allow producers to put forth a preferred reading of a text, though of course consumers have a great degree of latitude in their individual interpretations. As Chandler (1999) wrote, "Genres are not simply features of texts, but are mediating frameworks between texts, makers, and interpreters" (p. 3).

In the same vein, Knight (1994) asserted that, while formulaic genres do, of course, reduce the originality of a text, they also allow the readers/viewers a certain kind of pleasure as the readers test their hypotheses on the elements of the plot. She cited Paul Ricouer, Northrup Frye, and Roland as previous identifiers of this form of textual interpretation, which she calls the "formalist 'cognitivist' gambit." Knight (1994) also applauded the genre formula for its simplicity, as well as its ability to show characters doing what the viewers would like to do (Knight, 1994).

As well, genres serve to cue viewers to the modality of texts. A fantasy genre, for example, will mean that readers will be aware of the desirability of suspending disbelief while viewing the program. As Dirks (1999) wrote, "Fantasy films take the audience to netherworld places where events are unlikely to occur in real life—they transcend the bounds of human possibility and physical laws" (p. 1). He went on to say that they "often have an element of magic, myth, wonder, and the extraordinary" (p. 1). Dirks (1999) asserted that fantasy films frequently fall under the broader genre categories of science fiction and/or horror (e.g *Star Wars* and *Poltergeist*). This results from the narrative structure that involves the hero having a mystical experience that requires "superhuman" help to resolve. These characters and experiences often originate in myths or legends (Dirks, 1999). While some fantasy films such as *What Dreams May Come* bear resemblance to the films in this case study, the fantasy genre in general has little to offer to the understanding of angel films, which focus primarily on typical human experiences, augmented by focused "fantastic" experiences.

More in keeping with this study is the sub-genre of "Supernatural films." These include gods or goddesses, ghosts, apparitions, spirits, miracles, and other similar ideas or depictions of extraordinary phenomenon (Dirks, 1999). While supernatural sub-genre may fall under the generic categories of horror or comedy, they instead "are usually presented in a comical, whimsical, or a romantic fashion, and are not designed to frighten the audience" (Dirks, 1999, p. 1). Ghosts and other supernatural characters appeared as companions to earthly characters in a number of World War II films, such as *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) and *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (1947). While some films of the time did have serious horror functions, several films of the time focused more on the religious angle of the supernatural, such as *The Devil and Daniel Webster* (1941) and the guardian angel films *A Guy Named Joe* (1944) and *Angel on my Shoulder* (1946).

The popularity of these fantasy or supernatural films receives support in Fischoff, Antonio, and Lewis's (1997) study "Favorite Film Genres as a Function of Race, Age, and Gender." Though most films and genres had clear tendencies for race, gender, and age (for example, females preferred the romance/fantasy *Ghost* in much higher numbers than males), three fantasy films—*Star Wars, ET* and *Forrest Gump*—were favorites across demographic lines. Fischoff et al (1997) wrote that films such as these "touch viewers in such a universal way that cultural/experiential factors which may otherwise fragment film preferences among demographic groups, are overridden" (p. 5). They later noted that while the drama genre is most popular, the substantial popularity of science fiction and fantasy films show "it is clear that departure from reality has an abiding appeal for humans" (Fischoff et al, 1997, p. 18).

I propose that the "angelic genre" is a sub-sub-genre of the sub-genre "Supernatural" and/or "Fantasy" films. This sub-sub-genre involves angelic characters interacting with humans on earth. Based on the deeper analysis of the case studies previously presented, I have identified eight functions that occur in these stories:

1. Introduction of the angelic character(s).
2. Introduction of the earthly character(s).
3. Development of the key dichotomy expressed by the earthly character(s).
4. The intersection of the angelic and earthly characters in an earthly setting. The earthly character usually doesn't know the angel character(s) is/are, indeed, angelic.
5. The development of the personal crisis faced by the earthly character(s).
6. The earthly character(s) come(s) to believe in the angelic character(s) through some

miracle or other mystical act.

7. The earthly(s) character, through the inspiration of the angelic character(s), uses his or her own agency to solve a problem (often related to the dichotomy expressed earlier).
8. The angelic character(s) returns to the angelic realm.

This narrative structure loosely follows the "order, disorder, restored order" structure of other genres, including the Western (Wright, 1975). Specifically, each case study uses this formula in a slightly different way. The individual interpretations of the formula are discussed in the following sections. After this, Table 2 on page 170 provides a visual summary for ease of comparison.

City of Angels: Generic conventions

The central case study, *City of Angels*, opens with the introduction of the angelic protagonist Seth as he escorts a dying girl "home." Following this, the title sequence depicts angelic characters (now identifiable by their all-black clothes and trench coats) as they go about their duties alongside humans. Soon after, the earthly protagonist Maggie Rice, a cardiac surgeon, is introduced in a hospital context.

When her patient dies, Maggie's struggle with the infallibilities of science vs. faith becomes clear. Although Maggie somehow senses Seth during this critical hour, Seth and Maggie actually meet in the hospital hallway when Maggie mistakenly believes Seth is a friend of one of her heart patients. While Seth and Maggie's relationship grows, she senses something unusual about him. His identity as an angel becomes clear when a knife cuts through his hand without any injury. Maggie, now knowing Seth's angelic status, breaks off their relationship, which drives Seth to make the decision to fall and become human. Meanwhile, Seth's invisible presence brings Maggie the peace and rest which have often eluded her, and this peace inspires her to diagnose a baby who has been crying for no apparent reason. Seth and Maggie reunite for one night, and then Maggie is killed in a bicycle accident. The expected restored order achieved when Maggie and Seth are together does not last long. The spiritual order is restored, though, as Maggie and Seth have in a sense switched celestial and terrestrial places, drawing a parallel between the two.

Had Seth and Maggie continued their relationship in celluloid perpetuity, Seth could not have fully appreciated his human status beyond his physical love for Maggie. Her death forces him to look for simpler pleasures, such as savoring a ripe pear. In doing so, the film sends the message to its viewers that, despite any possible adversity, even the potential of an apocalpyse, the banal pleasures of humanity make life worth living, even for angels, who will give up everything to become human.

Michael: Generic Conventions

In the next case study, *Michael*, the archangel first appears in the title sequence, which vaguely depicts Michael bringing the power of God to "smote a bank" in defense of an elderly widow, of whom the bank took advantage. The film quickly shifts to introduce the tabloid reporters (Quindlen, Huey, and Dorothy) and their world of skepticism. Immediately, the tension between skepticism (embodied by the reporters) and faith (embodied by Michael and the widow) begins to tighten. When the reporters arrive at the farmhouse, and subsequently embark on the cross-country drive that will bring Michael back to the newspaper headquarters, the skepticism/faith dichotomy further develops. The reporters resist believing Michael is an angel until a truck hits their dog mascot and Michael brings the dog back to life. Though Michael has begun to fade, the reporters bring him back to the newspaper headquarters, though they themselves doubt this is the right thing to do. Just before reaching headquarters, Michael fades away, returning to heaven. The reporters are fired and go their separate ways, though a series of "coincidences" brings Quindlen and Dorothy back together for the quintessentially happy ending. Michael's return to heaven re-establishes the order of the cosmos.

Michael follows, for the most part, the genre formula of angel stores. The only difference involves the human characters relying less on their own agency to effect changes and resolve crises. Instead, they seem to act in reaction to Michael's commands and coincidences. If the maxim "acting is reacting" holds true, we can accept this definition of human agency. As well, Michael's role as an archangel perhaps contributes to this watering down of human agency.

Meet Joe Black: Generic Conventions

For *Meet Joe Black,* the introduction of the angelic character happens a bit obliquely at first, as it comes in the form of a disembodied voice that speaks to wealthy tycoon Parrish in the night. Parrish's character develops more fully as he interacts with his family, establishing the centrality of love in his life, earlier threatened by the disembodied voice. The tension between love/life and death becomes very real for Parrish, who rightly fears the imminence of his transition from life to death. Later that day, the angel of death takes on a human form and offers Parrish a few more days of life and love in exchange for a tour of the earthly world. Joe Black, the human incarnation of Death, then meets all of Parrish's family, including daughter Susan, who earlier met "the body" in a coffeeshop. Although Parrish initially seems skeptical of Joe Black's identity, he quickly accepts death as a companion. Joe Black does not, however, reveal his identity to the other characters. When the takeover crisis in Parrish's business comes to a head, Joe Black identifies himself as an IRS agent. Black's assistance enables Parrish to avert the hostile takeover. Parrish also has the time to say proper goodbye to his daughters and enjoy the outpouring of love at his 65th birthday celebrations. In the final moments of the film, death escorts Parrish to the other side, and the young man whose body Death used (and Susan fell in love with) returns, though he seems to not understand what has happened to him. This restoration of order, though not without sadness, brings life and death back into the proper balance. Though, surely, Parrish's death with bring tears, his life has clearly been full of love—he has "everything I could have ever wanted."

The departure from the generic formula in Joe Black involves the revelation of the angelic character's identity as both instantaneous (for Parrish) and nonexistent (for the others, including Susan). This occurs due to the nature of the angelic character who is, in fact, death. Parrish's earlier encounter with the disembodied voice has already primed him to accept the identity of death. As for Susan, never learning of death's identity, perhaps the romance would quickly wane had the beautiful and intelligent ingenue learned she had slept with Death (albeit in a nice package).

Touched by an Angel: Generic Conventions

The final case study, *Touched by an Angel*, differs significantly from the other texts as it is a television program of the "family genre," as opposed to a "fantasy" film. Nonetheless, *Touched*, too, follows the angel genre pattern, though perhaps more subtly.

The angels are always introduced at the beginning of the show as they discuss the subjects of their next case. Due to the serial nature of the show, viewers already know the angel characters well, allowing for a brief introduction. Next, the human characters are introduced. Though the characters differ from episode to episode, they do have a certain trait in common: they are basically good people who act badly. This dichotomy introduces the essential tension in the program: secular life vs. faithful life. The angels take on disguises to interact with their human "cases," and the chasm between secularism and faith widens for the human participants. Next, some sort of crisis occurs that requires the human to face a loss, perhaps of a life, of health, or a loved one's affection. At the pinnacle of the crisis, the angel reveals him- or herself and performs a small miracle that precipitates the human's belief. This newfound belief inspires the human to change his or her ways and begin to lead a more spiritual life. The angels then shed their disguises and return to their rightful place, and order is restored.

Touched follows the genre formula as perfectly as it can. This is likely due to the highly formulaic nature of serial television programming, driven by audience expectations. The introduction of the angelic and earthly characters occur immediately, and there is perhaps less character development due to time constraints as compared to the feature films. Nonetheless, the key dichotomy is quickly focused upon, resulting in a personal crisis for the human character(s). Then, the angel reveals herself, the human corrects the situation, and order is restored.

Table 2 on the following page summarizes the generic formula for the four case studies. Following this, the conclusion of this chapter synthesizes the analysis of the cases, drawing comparisons among them.

Table 2: The Generic Formula in the Four Case Studies

Generic Formula	*City of Angels*	*Michael*	*Meet Joe Black*	*Touched by an Angel*
Introduction of the angelic character.	Seth is introduced, escorting a dying girl back "home."	Michael destroys a bank in defense of an elderly woman who was taken advantage of by the bank.	Parrish hears voices in the night as he experiences chest pains. Later, a mysterious stranger appears and introduces himself as Death.	The angels appear at the beginning of the program, discussing the humans who are to be their "cases' for the episode.
Introduction of the earthly character.	Maggie is introduced in the context of cardiac surgery, which turns out to be unsuccessful.	The tabloid reporters and their world of hoaxes are introduced.	Parrish is introduced in the first scene of the film; his family is introduced soon after.	The earthly characters are introduced, usually in a somewhat negative or compromising way.
The development of the key dichotomy expressed by the earthly character.	Due to her failed surgery, Maggie begins to doubt that science has all the answers.	The reporters' skepticism about the possibility of an angel actually existing demonstrates their lack of faith.	Parrish has a life rich in love, and the realization that his own death is imminent prompts his desire to say goodbye to his loved ones in the best way possible.	The earthly character acts in an unspiritual way, which leads to hurt and pain for others.
The intersection of the angelic and earthly character in an earthly setting.	Maggie and Seth meet outside the hospital room of Nathan Messenger, a heart patient and an angel who has "fallen."	The reporters meet with Michael and question him about his angelic status, assuming that he is a hoax like their other stories	Parrish experiences the "voice in the night" in the first scene of the film. Joe Black comes to his home later, and Parrish is skeptical, calling him "just a kid in suit."	The angels take on disguises to interact with the earthly characters in an inconspicuous way.
The development of the personal crisis faced by the earthly character.	Maggie and Seth spend time together and discuss issues such as death and heaven, and she continues to question the role of science vs. faith.	The foibles of the earthly characters are developed, and these weaknesses revolve around faith and skepticism, focussed inward.	Parrish is about to lose his life and with it the earthly love of his family. He is also about to lose his business, an earthly reminder of his life.	The earthly character continues to act unspiritually and encounters serious crisis as a result.
The earthly character comes to believe in the angelic character through some miracle or other mystical act.	Seth cuts his hand with a knife. There is no blood or injury, so Maggie realizes that he is inhuman. She refuses a relationship with Seth because he cannot sense her the way she can sense him.	Michael brings a dog back to life, and the reporters believe he is really an angel.	Early in the film, Parrish accepts Death with little question when Death appears mysteriously in Parrish's study.	The angel (usually Monica) facilitates a miracle, such as preventing an accident or repairing a broken object. She brings the message that "God loves you," and the earthly character decides to become more spiritual.
The earthly character, inspired by the angelic character, uses his or her own agency to solve a problem	Maggie spends a rainy night alone, her usual insomnia gone. She realizes Seth has been with her in spirit the whole time. The restful night enables her to diagnose an ill baby.	Quindlen and Dorothy separate after returning to the city, and a series of coincidences leads them back together. Quindlen then proposes.	Parrish, with the assistance of Black, stops the hostile takeover, putting Susan's fiancé Drew in a (deservedly) compromising position.	The earthly character attempts to repair the hurt and pain caused when s/he was acting unspiritual.
The angelic character returns to the angelic realm.	Maggie dies and is taken to heaven; Seth remains on earth as a human.	Michael and Pansy see the reunion of Quindlen and Dorothy. Michael and Pansy then dance away into the night.	Death takes Parrish "to the other side" at the end of the birthday party. The young man from the coffeeshop returns with no recollection of what happened.	The angels disappear from the earthly context, dissolving back into their spiritual, angelic configuration.

Signs of Angelic Dramatis Personae: Signifiers and Signifieds

Overall, the angelic characters depicted in the television and film examples used in this study did not have the traditional, overt symbolic markers of their extra-worldliness such as wings, haloes, and robes as exemplified in most artwork depicting angels across the ages. Most often the symbols were either absent or replaced with more covert symbols (such as Seth's overcoat or the glowing light that appears behind Monica). The apparent blurring or omission of these iconic symbols demonstrates to me a desire to create a relationship between signifier and signified that is more human and less divine, or less reminiscent of traditional organized religion. Angels become more human when they appear as humans or when they appear as angels without their accouterments. The audience can relate to, or for that matter, ignore, a vague diffusion of light much more easily than wings sprouting out of someone's back. As well, subtle signs create intangible markers for intangible beings. Thus, by portraying angels in an almost humanized manner, the creators of these films and television programs reduce the likelihood of alienating viewers with uncertain views on angels or those who disbelieve. As well, these portrayals allow the audience to conceptualize angels, as humanized angels provide a concrete link with an abstract divinity. In essence, this clearly signifies angels in the image of humans.

Another facet of the humanized portrayal of angels is the angels' desire to experience human life. Whether the angels are motivated by the desire to taste, touch, or tear up, the case studies illustrated the desirability of human life. In the filmic portrayals, the angels are not entirely happy in their celestial roles. (Though the angels in *Touched* do not express this dissatisfaction to any extent, they do enjoy the pleasures of drinking coffee and driving a red convertible.) This puts a positive spin on human life, emphasizing that human life is worth living, a notion that may bear repeating in the face of apocalyptic millennium thinking. This trend is also reflected in other cultural trends, from the *Simple Abundance* and *Chicken Soup for the Soul* publishing trends, as well as Oprah Winfrey's encouragement that her viewers chronicle their (often banal) appreciations of the minutiae of life in a "Gratitude Journal."

The portrayal of angel characters also supports the general preferred reading that producers seem to want to espouse on angels as well as religion on the whole. First, while these films present essentially non-denominational messages about angels, religion, and spirituality, the films exhibit a Judeo-Christian bias in these messages. In the television program, this bias focuses more narrowly on Christianity. For example, this Christian hegemony comes through in ways such as the construction of angels as non-human messengers, references to heaven and God, and the emphasis on what could loosely be called Christian kindness ("entertaining angels unawares"). Even more specifically, however, this preferred reading focuses on the more positive aspects of Christian belief, ignoring issues such as angels' role in judgment. Further, this preferred reading dilutes the concentration of traditional Christianity by in fact allowing for a certain range of negotiated reading of the texts. People who may have their own alternative belief system, with or without some basis in Christianity, could in most cases certainly read the majority of signifiers as consistent with these alternative belief systems. While *Touched by an Angel* does have a clearly Christian focus, *City of Angels* and *Meet Joe Black*, and to a lesser extent, *Michael*, present the signifiers of angels in ways that could make sense from a variety of perspectives and spiritual frameworks. Thus, although the case studies present a preferred reading, this reading has enough flexibility built in to avoid alienating most potential consumers willing to give their movie entrance fees or advertising dollars to producers.

Furthermore, this "flexible" preferred reading, while it does support the dominant socio-cultural ideology, also imports the post structuralist/post modernist notion of deconstruction, though a brand of deconstruction with limits. Recognizing the restrictions of traditional Christianity and its practices such as patriarchy, deconstruction allows for the questioning of potentially questionable issues. For example, distilling out positive elements of Christianity and angel belief, while ignoring negative ones, establishes contention with the gatekeepers of religion, who may favor fear and unquestioning acceptance of ideas to support unequal power distributions. Of course, this deconstruction does have boundaries, and the questioning of issues such as the virtue of Christian kindness and an appreciation for the minutiae of everyday life would likely not fall in the range of appropriate readings of the texts and their symbols. This deconstruction supports the societal trend of secularization, with the decentralization of religion in much of society and the reformulation of spirituality for some people.

In conjunction with this trend of secularization, the appreciation or aestheticization of the everyday, while construed in the case studies in a positive vein, has some rather negative implications for the state of millennium era society. While suggesting people turn their attention to quotidian reflections, producers might surreptitiously or more blatantly turn people's attention away from larger socio-cultural issues. While the case studies all briefly feature serious societal issues, the texts do not suggest that either the protagonists or the consumers should attempt to solve these problems. In *City of Angels*, for example, an armed robbery demonstrates the problem of violent crime, an errant *People* magazine illustrates the problem with an adversarial and obsequious press, and a traffic jam suggests the problems inherent in urbanization. Neither of these problems, nor more importantly their possible solutions, receive any significant consideration in the film, however, which seems to give more coverage to the sensual pleasure of eating a pear. While people can certainly coterminously concern themselves with macro social problems as well as banal joyousness, the case studies seem to use artful sleight-of-hand to narrow the telescopic look away from the broad vista of societal woes in the millennium era.

Although the case studies give little surface attention to most broad social issues, the characterizations of the humanized angels do illustrate somewhat forward-thinking gender issues, though the Judeo-Christian Biblical tradition signifies angels as mainly genderless. The main male angel characters, Seth and Joe, are constructed as having a great deal of focus on experiencing romantic and carnal love during their time as humans. The main female angel character, Monica, is more focused on her helping role and does not seek out romantic or sexual relationships. While this may result more from genre issues (feature films usually portray romance and sex, while family programming does not), it does show a tendency to signify the gender roles of angels as parallel to the gender roles of humans. This signification clearly departs from Biblical construction of angels, though. Furthermore, the issue of gender roles in the angelic genre illustrates an issue in the political economy of media. Films with male leads have a history of financial success, while films with only female leads are often financially riskier. This is less true on the television medium, which can narrowcast to a more specific viewer groups and can thus star different types of actors. To a lesser extent, this imbalance may also account for the racial diversity in the television program that doesn't occur in the film case studies.

In the case studies, the postmodern focus on consumption, more specifically the gendered nature of consumption, becomes apparent as the motivation for creating the products. While the case studies may have artistic elements (e.g. the cinematography in *City of Angels* or the set dressing in *Meet Joe Black)*, the texts seem far more concerned with audience consumption than with portraying an artistic vision of the creators. As previously mentioned, the films feature prominent male actors as the bankable lead stars, with likable, if not equally bankable, female leads. Beyond their financial clout, these leading men seem to offer special appeal for female consumers as objects of affection. As well, the centrality of the love story further feminizes these films. Further, the male characters, as angels, have somewhat blurred gender roles. As Fowkes (1998) suggested, the films subject the male characters to "genderswitching," whereby they experience some feminine situations and emotions, such as virtual emasculation and powerlessness. Unlike quintessential "chick flicks" that star only women (e.g. *Steel Magnolias, Fried Green Tomatoes*), the presence of these masculine lead actors helps make male moviegoers compliant, if not active, in the consumption of these films.

Beyond the gendered, yet somewhat universal, nature of the consumption of these films, the loose religious construction of the angel characters makes the international success of the films more likely, of particular concern in regions where Christianity is not the dominant religion. Further, the latitude of acceptance of "spirit" characters such as angels is highly likely in Asian cultures reputed to embrace spirits in forms of ghosts or other incarnations.

For the television case study, audience expectations also shape the construction of characters and storylines, though in a narrower sense than the films of course. Having two female lead characters (one white, one black; one younger, one older) provides an opportunity for a cross-section of women to identify with these angel characters. The focus on these angels helping people provides yet another source of identification, as does the prominence of children and other disenfranchised groups (immigrants, persons with disabilities) in the programs. The family nature of the program, and its early primetime Sunday positioning, help garner audiences beyond women in households, which of course boosts overall ratings. The addition of a male angel in the third seasons also broadened the potential for male viewership, again compliant if not actually active in their viewing. For the television show as well as the films, audience expectations and consumption patterns give shape to the symbols that form the texts. After all, the profit motive does outweigh the prophet motive (Medved, 1997, p. 114).

For viewers consuming the media texts, the recipients of angel encounters are also very important, as they signify the skepticism that people may have towards angelic beings. In *City*, Maggie the doctor's ability to reconcile her scientific background with a belief in angels and heaven shows the viewer that a life with science and spirituality is possible. The journalism business is also known for its skepticism, as were the case study characters of Parrish (in the Communications business) and Quindlen and Huey (tabloid reporters). Their search for truth ends in their belief in angelic beings, and thus reflects to viewers the logical endpoint for their own searches for truth. The characters to whom the angels in *Touched* appear cannot be categorized so neatly, as they come from a variety of professional and socio-economic backgrounds. These characters all, however, have in common their skepticism towards a spiritual life. Again, the audience can perhaps relate to this skepticism, which melts away as the characters encounter the angel in a time of crisis. So, whether viewers can actually identify with these characters personally or as societal symbols of rationality and truth, the characters who encounter angels in the cast studies serve as reminders of how "otherwise normal" people come to believe in angels.

Another interesting, though minor, issue that appears in the study is the analogy drawn between death and taxes. The most obvious, if humorous, reference comes when the mysterious Joe Black is identified not as Death but as an IRS agent. This identification follows an earlier comment by the film's antagonist about the only two certainties in life—death and taxes. A similar parallel comes in an episode *Touched* when Andrew, the angel of death, appears in human form as an IRS agent auditing the factory owner's books. In that same episode, Andrew later appears as the angel of death. I see this twinning of the signifiers death and taxes as -a means to humanize death and deflect fear about dying. Again, this coalesces around apocalyptic imagery in millennium era culture.

In general, the formula followed by all the case studies necessitates a "return to order" that includes some sad element. This sad element may include death (for Maggie and Parrish, and for Michael in a corporeal sense) or some other loss (a con-man father losing custody of his daughter) required for living a more spiritual life. The cases, however, treat these sad elements in an essentially positive way. For example, though Parrish dies, he is shown to have led a full and rich life, including the reclamation of his company from an impersonal merger. As well, the father who loses custody of his daughter does so because he must go to jail, which he recognizes as a necessary step in paying his dept to society and becoming a more spiritual person. Thus, these negative experiences become constructed as unavoidable, even positive, aspects of life that can in fact enrich the spiritual lives of those involved.

In contrast, the overwhelming number of coincidences that are portrayed as angelic intervention encourage a spiritual belief in fate or destiny and, in a sense, magic. Although the humans call on their own agency to resolve the challenges they face in life, this happens only after the magical appearance of the angel. I believe this centrality of coincidence is important in two ways. First, it allows the audience to be "in" on the presence of angels before the humans in the case studies. Thus, the audience can come to believe in angels alongside the humans, though at the media-accelerated rate because the viewer sees both perspectives of the coincidence, the angel, and the human. Second, these coincidences provide easy opportunities for viewers to come to believe in angels, just as the subtle, human-like appearance of the angels makes this plausible. If the programs merely portrayed angels performing miracles, viewers may have difficulty believing in the reality of angels. Rather, seeing angels intervene, such as helping an air traffic controller with a wandering mind, suggests that angels exist to help humans in small ways, regardless of humans' belief in angels. Again, this belief also presents itself in other aspects of popular culture, whenever fate and destiny are present.

Through contemporary linkages between signifiers and signifieds in the media case studies, the construction of the angels is also quite modern, rather than wholly traditional. There are, of course, some traditional Judeo-Christian treatments of angels, such as the male characterizations and their roles as messengers to humans. By and large, though, the angels all bear little resemblance to the traditional characterizations of angels, especially the winged, haloed creatures of the art world. The physical portrayals of the angels as appearing human, coupled with their actions (such as having sex or enjoying pears, coffee, and convertibles) situate the angels firmly in postmodernity with all its pleasures. Further, the angels in the case study are not at all vengeful or judgmental, as they are portrayed in scripture such as Revelations and the Book of Enoch. Rather, they embody infinite love. This supports a turn away from fire and brimstone organized religion to more positive and loving, and perhaps more secular, forms of spirituality. This positive portrayal, however, does divorce angels from one of their traditional Judeo-Christian roles in Judgment Day. In doing so, it waters down the importance of angels somewhat, as they garner no fear by humans if the angels are only capable of love.

Conclusion

According to the Judeo-Christian Biblical tradition, angels' existence revolves around humans. Similarly, the angels portrayed in the case studies of this article exist for the purpose of interacting with, and bringing messages to, humans. These angels demonstrate that human life is desirable, a message that bears repeating in apocalyptic millennium times. As well, the angels bring the message that death, a natural part of life, need not be feared. In these issues of life and death, angels can serve as tangible, understandable mediaries between the human and divine worlds. The angels demonstrate the philosophy of "secular spirituality" present in the postmodern epoch. By divorcing traditional, religious (Biblical) signifiers from the angel signified in these programs, subjects consuming these media products encounter this notion of secular spirituality. This characteristic of postmodernity reflects the general movement away from organized religion towards a more flexible, optimistic form of spirituality. Finally, the angels also reinforce messages about societal issues, such as gender roles. Although the "Entertaining Angels" in this study aim primarily to entertain viewers, their portrayal brings powerful messages to viewers unawares.

CHAPTER 5:
MATERIAL ANGELS: CONSUMER CULTURE & ANGEL COLLECTIBLES

Introduction

As with the popularity of media products and websites related to angels, the popularity of angel collectibles and giftware emphasizes how belief in angels pervades people's lives. As the following section discusses, collectibles have functional roles in people's lives, and collectibles also have functional roles in the development and practice of spirituality. Owing to the nature of collectibles as commodities and works of art, they also create a link between the producers and consumers of these products. This chapter investigates the clear presence that angel collectibles have in current material culture retail environments.

First, this chapter addresses the issue of the study of material culture with special focus on spirituality, in a general context. Next, the chapter examines the broad methodological issues of examining material culture, with subsequent focus on the semiological model used for this research into material culture. Finally, the chapter discusses the results of the angels and material culture research, which included observations at retail stores specializing in angel merchandise and interviews with owners/managers of these stores. In general, angel collectibles present a wide range of signifiers, from traditional and Biblical to contemporary and whimsical. As I will speculatively argue, the linkages between signifier and signified in the angel material culture has less importance than the generic signification angel collectors wish to publicly display with the visibility of their purchases. These angel collectibles also maintain a curious place in millennium era society, with its general secular focus augmented with pockets of personal expression of spirituality.

Material Culture: Issues and Approaches

As a first step in exploring material culture, I turn to the work of Elizabeth Chaplin (1994) on visual culture, using it as a "parent" discipline from which I later focus on the specific aspect of material culture. Generally, Chaplin (1994) called for more sociological attention to visual culture and more attention to visual representation within studies that are sociological. Overall, Chaplin (1994) posed the question that verbal language is one, but not the only, language through which people express themselves. Interestingly, Chaplin (1994) reminded that dreams are essentially visual images; likewise, visual images have a dreamlike quality in their representation of our utopian or unconscious desires. Attention to visual culture does not merely involve art criticism, though. Rather, the constructivist approach to art and visual culture, consistent with the focus of this dissertation, focuses on contextual features, rather than on the art per se.

To begin, Chaplin (1994) reminded that visual representation is not objective, but intentionally framed by creators for receivers. According to her, critical writing about visual representation must acknowledge this ideological element. She recognized the Marxist perspective on art, that of "artist as thinker, as educator, as unfolder of social truths, as one who reveals the inner workings of society, as ideologist who pierces the veil of false consciousness" (p. 26). She went on to note that "art simultaneously reflects and transcends, is created by history and creates history; it points towards the future by reference to the past, aiming to liberate latent tendencies in the future" (p. 27). Chaplin (1994) also pointed out the Gramscian perspective on art, that it can have a critical function to counter hegemonic processes. Later, Chaplin (1994) saw Althusser as perceiving that "the arts exert ideological influence on behalf of capitalism," (p. 30) acknowledging this focus on the reception moment of art. Adorno, on the other hand, saw the avant garde artists as having an activist-type function for society, ignoring market issues of commodified art. Chaplin (1994) noted that, according to Adorno, "[i]n Western society, before the rise of capitalism, art works performed a religion-enhancing function, and their production was tied to the social construction of a God-centered society" (p. 37). Thus, in capitalist society, art acts as a commodity, as a means to express status. According to Benjamin, the role of art in society is utopian, as the artist "reawakens frozen consciousness" (p. 42). To Marcuse, capitalism undermines artistic alienation, making it commercially one-dimensional (Chaplin, 1994). I believe that, by conforming to market trends, an artist in essence gives up the "critique" function.

Despite this focus on the ideological nature of visual culture, Chaplin (1994) acknowledged some uneasiness about postmodernism on the part of some feminists (such as herself, I believe, though she did not specifically articulate this opinion). She particularly noted postmodernism's foundation on male-centered Enlightenment thinking. As well, she saw postmodernism as having the tendency to colonise or misrepresent. She did suggest, however, that looking at visual culture through the lens of deconstruction could illuminate its critical functions. For example, most of the angel collectibles that I discuss bear little resemblance to the Judeo-Christian angels discussed in the Bible or depicted in much art through the ages. The contemporary constructions of angels as very different from these traditional angels could serve as a critique of the North American Judeo-Christian bias while presenting alternative visions of spirituality and religion for a society entrenched in the process of secularization. Similarly, Chaplin (1994) argued that we should expect the constructions of images such as angels to change throughout time. She supported Becker's view that aesthetics intertwine with the favored convention of a time and place, and as those change, so too do aesthetics

As this discussion of visual culture illustrates, examining material culture such as angel collectibles must involve much more than observation of the collectibles themselves. Rather, attention must focus on the processes of production and consumption involved with the products to understand properly the role of these cultural products in the social context. Scholars of material culture etch out some of these psychological and social forces entrenched in the consumption of these products, with a knowledgeable eye cast on the producers of the products as well.

Although material culture provides an infinite array of types of collectibles, people establish and add to their specific collections for very similar reasons, regardless of the actual type of collectible. These reasons can range from very personal and emotional to broader social functions.

Muensterberger (1994), for example, observed that people often look to their collectibles as a means to deal with emotions such as anxiety or loneliness, seeking solace through a tangible, yet inanimate, object. He went on to say that "the collector, not unlike the religious believer, assigns power and value to these objects, because their presence and possession seem to have a modifying—usually pleasure-giving—function in the owner's mental state" (Muensterberger, 1994, p. 9). Thus, just as people construct the roles of angels as messengers and guardians, people may extend the same construction to symbolic material objects with angelic features. In fact, Muensterberger (1994) likened collectibles to the Durkheimian notion of totemism, whereby a culture embraces an object as a sacred because of the perception that "mana" (an animate force) flows through the object. But beyond the conscious or unconscious believed "powers" of collectibles, people may seek out material objects such as angel figurines so they can own, and by extension control, these objects (Muensterberger, 1994). Metaphorically, then, owning an angel object extends to owning an angel's power.

Muensterberger (1994) also wrote that the passion for collecting arises from "a tendency which derives from a not immediately discernible sense memory of deprivation or loss or vulnerability and a subsequent longing for substitution—closely allied with moodiness and depressive leanings" (p. 3). In simple terms, people collect in order to fill a void in their lives. For example, a person might feel a vague emotional or spiritual lack in her life. She may purchase angel collectibles for her home in an (unconscious) attempt to feel full or inflated by the spirit. Muensterberger (1994) also emphasized the subjective and individual nature of the collector's desire for particular objects for particular reasons. Muensterberger (1994) went on to discuss Walter Benjamin's views on ownership of collectibles as providing for collectors an intimate relationship with the objects that allow them to live vicariously through the objects. The infusing of objects with this magical power may have its origins in childhood, when a favorite blanket or toy produced solace (Muensterberger, 1994, p. 17). Further, in a Freudian psychoanalytic vein, the mastery over bowel functions in early childhood may also influence a collector, who learns that collection equates closely with self-mastery (Muensterberger, 1994, p. 20).

Other historical motivations for collecting might include a desire for a tangible symbolic reminder of new discoveries, a means to show prosperity, and the tensions between spirituality and reason (Muensterberger, 1994). As well, a real or perceived personal imperfection may drive the desire to collect "perfect" objects or to have a "perfect" collection. This becomes a desexualized redirection of sexual drives.

Collecting may also result from the search for personal value, or from a need for competition, accomplishment, or pride. Through loving the objects, owners can feel self-worth as they deem themselves worthy of the valued objects they collect (Muensterberger, 1994). And, what higher spiritual worth can a person have than that of an angel? In a similar vein, Muensterberger (1994) uses the example of relics of saints and martyrs to demonstrate how objects can take on a religious or mystical significance.

As John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (1994) argued in the introduction of an edited volume entitled *The Cultures of Collecting,* collecting also extends to the carving out of an individual's identity. Thus, identity reflects from a person's collection of objects, also in comparison with other people's collections of objects. They wrote, "[t]aste, the collector's taste, is a mirror of self" (Elsner and Cardinal, 1994, p. 3). As well, people's collections can mark them as part of a group, resolute individuals, or inventive pioneers, depending on how their collection compares with others. This identity-through-collection extends beyond life, as well, as collectors know their objects will remain after the death of the collectors, insuring a bit of immortality (Elsner and Cardinal, 1994). Furthermore, this identity can extend to include the creation of personal expressions of spirituality, of particular significance when organized religion retreats and secularized spirituality increases.

To extend this notion of collecting as a function of self-identity, Mikhail Csikzentmihalyi (1993) wrote:

> Artifacts help objectify the self in at least three major ways. They do so first by demonstrating the owner's power, vital erotic energy, and place in the social hierarchy. Second, objects reveal the continuity of the self through time, by providing foci of involvement in the present, mementos and souvenirs of the past, and signposts to future goals. Third, objects give concrete evidence of one's place in a social network as symbols (literally, the joining together) of valued relationships. In these three ways, things stabilize our sense of who we are; they give a permanent shape to our views of ourselves that otherwise would quickly dissolve in the flux of consciousness. (p. 23)

Csikszentmihalyi (1993) went on to say that "for most people, the home is not just a utilitarian shelter but a repository of things whose familiarity and concreteness help organize the consciousness of their owner, directing it in well-worn grooves" (p. 25).

Thus, collecting not only serves in the identity formation process, but also the usual context for display of the collection, the home, has a central role in this process.

While these personal and social reasons for collecting help to explain *why* people collect, it is also necessary to understand the meaning of *what* they collect. The semiological model, discussed in the methods section of Chapter 2, can illuminate the construction of meanings of the collectibles, such as angels, that people choose to consume, exchange, and display.

Material Culture and Signification

Though semiotics can engender a rich understanding of material culture, its use in understanding these objects differs from its use in understanding the television and film texts discussed in Chapter Four. The semiotic significance of material culture objects, of course, is entwined with the identity and social functions previously discussed. To me, material culture objects serve in a triad of forms of signification. First, the producer of an object uses particular signifiers to construct an object that signifies something general, independent of the ultimate consumer or collector of the object. Second, the object usually signifies something to the collector, as the selection of particular objects over others involves the choice of certain characteristics. Third, collectors often use the objects to signify, in turn, various conscious and unconscious ideas about their identity and, in this case, spirituality to people who view these objects, typically as extensions of their owners in a domestic context.

In support of the use of semiotics to understand material culture, Poster (1988) wrote of Baudrillard, "Only a semiological model, he argues, can decipher the meaning structure of the modern commodity" (p. 1). (This evidences Baudrillard's move away from Marxism to more post-structuralist approaches.) Baudrillard's (1970*) Consumer Society* broaches the notion that consumer objects work in a complex system of interrelated signs. Thus, a particular sign (such as an iconic representation of angelic imagery, e.g. a halo) operates within a system of cultural signs (a large number of symbols present in an angel figurine) within other systems of signs (an entire product line, a medium, a society).

Schiffer (1999) reminded that material culture is an important way that human beings differentiate themselves from other animals and that people spend virtually all their time immersed with artifacts and interacting with other people immersed in artifacts. Focusing on objects, rather than the more traditional focus on texts, provides for a richer understanding of social life. Thus, Schiffer (1999) advocated an archaeological model for examining these artifactual modes of communication. As observers or receivers of artifacts, we do and should make inferences about the emitter, sender, receiver, and context of a communication act (Schiffer, 1999). Thus, this model also supports the use of semiotics as a line of inquiry into the understanding of material culture.

In terms of the specific application of semiotics to material culture, Maquet (1993) made the distinction that objects function both as instruments and signs. Thus, an angel lapel pin may have an instrumental function (an aesthetic piece of jewelry to adorn clothing) and a sign function (to proclaim the wearer's spirituality and belief in angels). Maquet (1993) suggested that interpreting through observation the instrumental and signifying factors of objects required inferences and is thus grounded in probability, not certainty. While instrumental factors are somehow inherent in the objects, the signifying process rests in the consensus of the group culture and can often result in a multiplicity of possible meanings. To address the potential for subjective and infinite meanings, Maquet (1993) suggested seeking consensus from other researchers, using scientific inquiry for hypothesis testing, and accessing information from "cultural insiders." For my research, I used retailers as these informed cultural insiders.

In terms of the origins of material culture objects, Friedel (1993) asserted that the materials of which objects are made bring with them information about the financial, aesthetic, and technological status of the culture, among other things. Similarly, Gordon (1993) wrote of the backward-linkage (origin) and forward-linkage (use) of objects that must be examined to understand the contextual meaning of the object. This emphasizes the need for a contextual understanding of the production and consumption of material culture objects. Hunt (1993) acknowledged that the process of observing and interpreting material culture involves understanding the same sort of processes of encoding and decoding that influence the study of other forms of culture. Again, the retailers I interviewed provided some of this contextual insight for the products beyond what I could discern through my observations.

The semiotic significance of material culture objects begins, for the consumer at least, at the moment of consumption or purchase. In "The System of Objects," Baudrillard (1968) wrote of "the random selection of objects from others" (p. 11). This random selection—consumption—clearly becomes a means through which consumers construct identity, always mindful of intersubjective relations. While Baudrillard's discussion, mostly of advertising, focuses on the economic implications of consumption (this writing having taken place prior to Baudrillard's disenchantment with Marxist critique of capitalism), this consumption has significant psycho- and socio-logical implications. In particular, Baudrillard (1968) wrote of the actualization that comes through consumption, quoting Pierre Martineau's notion that "any buying process is an interaction between the personality of the individual and the so-called 'personality' of the products itself" (p. 14).

For example, through consumption, individuals simultaneously feed their own needs and construct their identities. An individual who feels a slight yearning for spirituality in the secular context of the millennium era, for example, may seek to consume an angel wallhanging. Through this consumption, the individual shorthands to the world the identity of a spiritual person. Of course, this needs/identity function may not occur in this way at all times. The desire to cover a stain on a wall may, for example, outweigh spiritual need. Similarly, purchasing the object may construct an identity not of spirituality but of compliance with the capitalist system and the notion of the false creation of need, e.g. the need to cover a stain on a wall that is otherwise perfectly serviceable.

In fact, according to Baudrillard (1970), the perpetual consumption of objects/signs results from the lack of satisfaction derived from the consumptive process, requiring more and more consumption in a never-ending attempt to fill the void, meet the need, and construct the identity. As Baudrillard (1970) wrote, "Needs are not so much directed at objects, but at values. And the satisfaction of needs primarily expresses an *adherence to these values"* (p. 37*)*.

Of course, some material culture objects have less concrete use-value (i.e. figurines), as they primarily serve to communicate intangible information such as social factors—identity, status. In an historical example, wealthy homeowners would hang extremely long curtains on their windows that would form a pool of extra fabric on the floor. This extra fabric symbolized to guests that the family was wealthy enough to afford such excess and waste. Even giving material culture as a gift enables people to "give" of themselves symbolically (Mauss, p. 100, as discussed in Dant, 1999, p. 8). As Dant (1999) wrote, "All objects are social agents in the limited sense that they *extend human action* and *mediate meanings* between humans " (p. 123). Dant went on to say that "Culture is embedded and disembedded throughout the life of the object while the processes of production and consumption are organized around economic exchange." (p. 14). Dant (1999) saw the Marx-inspired focus on the economic implications of production and consumption of material culture as incomplete. Rather, he called on Veblens's (1953[1899]) theory of conspicuous consumption to emphasize the social importance of these economic functions. Dant (1999) went on to incorporate Bourdieu's notion of taste cultures as a socially-wedded construct of consumption. This social or public aspect, through central to the communicative importance of material culture, must be understood in conjunction with how consumers interact with these objects in a private context, such as their homes.

Dant (1999) wrote, "Material culture is not, apparently, about engagement with the objects themselves, but about uncritically accepting ideas and values about them" (p. 25). Dant (1999) also emphasized the importance of "living with things" after the consumption per se has taken place; this involves the continued signification of the object to both its owners and other people. For example, to the average collector, material culture can:

- Designate status
- Have aesthetic value
- Function in rituals
- Inspire discourse (p. 387).

In terms of an angel figurine displayed in a home, for example, these functions could be manifested in the following specific situations:

- Designating the homeowner(s) as Christian
- Adding beauty to a room through elegant craftsmanship
- Serving as a central point in a personal alter or place of daily meditation
- Encouraging visitors to open a conversation about angelic encounters

Despite these useful functions of objects, at some level they remain centralized as commodities in the (typically) capitalist retail environment. The centrality of these objects in material culture is based on, or at least relevant to, the notion of commodity fetishism. As advanced by Marx, Freud, and Baudrillard, commodity fetishism involves the unrealistic attribution of value to objects. Often construed as negative, it involves the inappropriate worship of an object, and in Freudian thinking, sexual attachment to an object. The object, clearly, substitutes for something. Similarly, semiotic fetishism, as theorized by Baudrillard, involves object rituals where the object's sign value is that which is fetishised (Dant, 1999). In terms of angel collectibles, this worship or reverence of the object is analogous to a religious ritual. This possibility of object-worship takes on increased significance in the context of a generally secular North American society in the millennium era. While Dant (1999) acknowledged overdetermination of the "semiotic fetish" as a possibility, he nonetheless seemed to return to this notion as an essential tool in understanding material culture.

Again, objects serve as signs privately (to their owners) as well as publicly (to others). Kingery (1996) wrote, "artifacts are tools as well as signals, signs, and symbols. Their use and functions are multiple and intertwined. Much of their meaning is subliminal and unconscious" (p. 1). Thus, a person who purchases an angel wallhanging, for example, may consciously purchase it because it matches a room's decor. The person may be unaware of her unconscious desire to display the angel as a means to communicate her sense of spirituality, perhaps because she does not attend church regularly and her other signifying processes do not denote this spirituality. The angel wallhanging thus provides a bridge of sorts between her "collective unconscious" need for spirituality and her current secular life.

Furthermore, Kingery (1996) emphasized the importance of understanding the roles and relationship of objects, producers, and consumers. For example, a producer of angel lapel pins may create the object with a particular use in mind: to inspire the wearer with the comfort of a guardian angel. The consumer, though, may simply purchase it because of the pin's appearance, with little consideration to the producer's intended use value of the object. The complexity of mass production further complicates the issue, as the laborer who actually produces the object may have not specific use in mind for the object, or at very least a mundane use. Like other scholars, Kingery (1996) recognized the usefulness of an object on different levels, as both a utilitarian object and a symbol through which we create our identity.

Kingery (1996) also emphasized the need to focus on the human activities relating to material culture, including its production, distribution, use, and meaning (Kingery, 1996, p. 182). While he focused more on "primitive" or historical artifacts, his point applies equally to contemporary creations. Of particular interest in this study is the importance of popular or commercial "art." In keeping with this focus, Gowans (1991) pointed out that popular/commercial art transmits cultural values, and it works at all levels of society, unlike elite art forms. This popular/commercial art may serve, in addition to aesthetic functions, a role in people's everyday rituals. As Metcalf (1991) wrote:

> every society is organized around regularized activities which attempt to determine and express what is important to that group. These activities are called rituals. Rituals dramatize social meaning, thereby channeling the flux of our experience into established, and knowable, conventions. Although many rituals are purely verbal, some of the most effective ones employ objects to help manipulate, establish, and record important meanings (p. 199).

For example, a person may start each morning with a coffee cup painted with angels as a conscious or unconscious way to connect with spiritual matters at the beginning of the day. This enables the carving out of personal forms of spirituality beyond the generally more rigid practices of organized religion.

Clearly, this ritual function moves material culture objects out of a purely capitalist context. While Metcalf (1991) recognized the centrality of economics in the production and consumption of folk art, he also acknowledged the organic, rather than academic, nature of the art's creation. As a result of this organic origin, commercial art's production and consumption are more closely embedded in each other than that of elite art. Artists create the objects not merely because they wish to express themselves in a particular way but because they believe consumers will want these objects. Similarly, consumers may perceive a closer, if imagined, relationship with the producers of commercial art as compared with elite art, because the mode of expression more closely matches their own experiences and expressions.

As a further example of the entrenchment of popular/commercial art, it can serve a function in the construction and reproduction of organized religion and personal spirituality. Metcalf (1991) discussed Geertz's idea that religion is that aspect of cultural activity that operates to synthesize a people's sense of the meaning and value of life with their view of the actual state of affairs. The material objects with which people surround themselves may form a part of the rituals and meanings that exist as the backbone of religion and spirituality. And, the private nature of these collectibles makes possible more creative and individual expressions of spirituality than religion may allow.

In fact, Metcalf (1991) wrote:

> the consumption of folk art can function as a religious ritual because it operates to connect important social and historical meanings (embedded in terms such as 'individualism' and 'democracy') to mundane things or activities (weathervanes or handicraftsmanship) sustaining each element and integrating the American experience as it is lived and as it is imagined. More important, however, and this is the case for all religious symbols, the meaning which is fused into folk art objects is generally *transcendent*. Representing concepts of ultimate truth, these interpretations affirm the American vision of God's holy plan (p. 205)

Why, then, if material culture has such a vital role in religion, has little attention been paid to this connection?

Miller (1987) suggested that scholars have largely ignored material culture, and domestic material culture (that centered on the home) especially has not received much scholarly attention. In particular, Miller (1987) viewed the denigration of much "popular" culture as ignoring the truly important issue: the social issues embedded in these objects. As Hegel wrote about art objects, they fulfill "the universal need for art, that is to say, is man's rational need to lift the inner and outer world into his spiritual consciousness as an object in which he recognizes again his own self" (as quoted in Miller, 1987, p. 29).

My research into angel collectibles built upon these issues of material culture and the role of semiotics in understanding this area of study. In particular, the examination material culture with religious significance informed this project.

Material Spirituality

In her book *Material Christianity: Popular Culture and Religion in America,* Catherine McDannell (1995) discussed the particular importance that material culture has for our experiences with religion. As McDannell (1995) wrote, "American Christians...want to see, hear, and touch God" (p. 1), and through collectibles such as angel figurines, this desire becomes a reality. She continued on to say "[p]eople build religion onto the landscape, they make and buy pious images for their homes, and they wear special reminders of their faith next to their bodies" (p. 1). Angel statues and gravestones, angel wallhangings, and angel lapel pins all reflect these observations. As well, she asserted "[t]hroughout American history, Christians have explored the meaning of the divine, the nature of death, the power of healing, and the experience of the body by interacting with a created world of images and shapes" (McDannell, 1995, p.1). Again, through creating and consuming material angels, people give themselves the opportunity to construct a role for angels in their lives.

Despite its value in people's lives, religious scholars often do not take material culture seriously because of the juxtapositioning of the sacred with the secular. McDannell (1995) disagreed in a sense, as Jesus himself in the Christian tradition represents an incarnation or embodiment, just as religious material culture represents an incarnation. At the same time, religious artifacts enable people to experience the supernatural, the presence of which has waned in contemporary, secularized society. Perhaps scholars have ignored material culture because of its association with disenfranchised groups, what McDannell (1995) categorized as women, children, and "other illiterates."[29] In particular, these disenfranchised groups need icons to experience religion, because traditional religious practices often neglect to include them. Those objects such as angel collectibles become meaningful through people's social interactions and their interactions with the objects. Durkheim's dualism of sacred and profane comes into play with religious artifacts, as the artifacts are often imbued with sacred powers, yet used in profane, everyday contexts. In the Platonic, Hebraic, and Puritanic traditions, however, spirituality does not necessitate a physical manifestation through material culture (McDannell, 1995). Rather, spirituality is rooted in word, thought, and deed.

Nonetheless, McDannell (1995) asserted that physical sensations of sight, touch, smell, voice, and hearing could stimulate more cognitive or emotive reactions to religion and spirituality. The methods she used include observation and informed speculation about the objects and what they represent, a semiotic-type analysis of the objects of material culture. She also used interviews with collectors and retailers, as well as market research, to supplement her observations. McDannell (1995) cautioned that this speculation is tentative, and she is even tentative about making conclusions based upon the information presented by collectors and retailers. As a result of the nature of her research focus, McDannell's (1995) methods very much shaped the methods I elected to use for this research.

In particular, Roman Catholic sacraments such as communion provide a clear, institutionalized example of how material objects bridge the distance between the human and divine. As McDannell (1995) wrote, "Catholic theologians uphold the sacraments as the primary way in which the saving power of Christ enters the world" (p. 19). One step down from sacraments are sacramentals, such as making the sign of the cross, which bring the sacred out of the church and even more into the everyday lives of laypeople (McDannell, 1995, p. 19). These institutionalized sacramentals have religious, if not spiritual, superiority over "lay" objects with religious themes, such as figurines or paintings featuring Biblical images.

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[29] Conceivably, the largely Protestant denominational lines in the U.S. also influenced McDannell's (1995) perception that religious material culture has received little attention from scholars. In countries with dominant Catholic traditions, where use of religious idols has remained fairly consistent over time, scholars may have given more attention to religious material culture. While this possibility provides an interesting area of inquiry, it is outside the scope of the present project.

Art also has a strong impact on people's sense of religion, particularly as they come to know the figures of Mary and Jesus so frequently painted, often with angels alongside them (McDannell, 1995). As well, material objects can spark particular memories such as the receiving of a family Bible might symbolize a rite of passage, later recalled when the recipient reads or uses the object (McDannell, 1995). Additionally, the use of material culture signifies a person's beliefs, status, group belonging, and taste (McDannell, 1995). McDannell (1995) asserted that, while material culture has always been a part of religion, it has become more commonplace in the contemporary era due to "cheaper production, efficient distribution, and the willingness of Christians to integrate religion into every aspect of their lives" (p. 223). Further, she noted that the marketing of religious material culture historically has had both spiritual and commercial motivations, driven by cultural trends as well as piety. These rather capitalist notions became especially important as I examined angel-related stores.

McDannell (1995) credited in particular the Church of God's *Gospel Trumpet* magazine, which advertised and sold Christian artifacts, and the proliferation of Christian bookstores with the growth in popularity of Christian material culture. The success of the bookstores results in large part from the evangelical movement of youthful "post-hippies" in the 1970s that embraced Christianity as a belief system and as a lifestyle characterized by a highly personal relationship with Jesus (McDannell, 1995). Christian retailing in recent years has kept pace with the life trends of these post-hippie evangelicals. As McDannell (1995) wrote, "Just as some of the hippies grew up to be yuppies, so Christians became more politically and socially conservative" (p. 256).

Although the angel retailers examined in this study do not necessarily have a direct relationship with Christian bookstores, utilizing the consumer research of these bookstores may provide some demographic illustration of angel retailers' potential consumers. McDannell (1995) cites a 1992 Christian Booksellers Association survey that found its customers were in large part middle-aged, middle-class white Protestant women. Further, the businesses are largely customer-driven, and they tend to stock more non-print merchandise than they did twenty years ago (McDannell, 1995). As well, in order to attract the largest customer base, many stores have branched out into "non-denominational" stores rather than cater to one specific denomination. As the bookstores continue to evolve, they often form partnerships or become acquired by larger, lay distributors. For example, media conglomerate Rupert Murdoch now owns the religious publishing house Zondervan (McDannell, 1995). This sort of relationship between religious and secular organizations may create tensions, as the belief systems of both organizations may prove incommensurable. For producers, distributors, and consumers, buying and selling Christian products has become a religious activity.

Beyond these reasons why people collect, the particulars of what they can and do collect are also important to understand. In a very general sense, culture, in addition to historical traditions of craft and individual motivations, shapes the way artifacts are created (Gay, as discussed in Prown, 1993). Cultural forces impact the creation of these artifacts on both conscious and unconscious levels. The shared cultural forces of a particular time and place can, especially in retrospect, demonstrate a prevailing style in the artifacts of that period. As Prown (1993) suggested, "the deep structural meanings of artifacts can be sprung loose by going beyond cataloguing them as historical facts to analyzing them as fictions" (p. 6). Through analysis of material objects, a social scientist can uncover both structural (physical) and textual (emotional) metaphors of artifacts (Prown, 1993). Thus, a researcher's observation and analysis of material culture objects can potentially uncover the more latent meanings of the object than questioning the producer and/or consumer of the object. Semiotics, then, presents the best available method for unpacking these meanings.

As Prown (1993) summarized, the human "experience is transformed into belief that finds material expression in artifacts, the analysis of which—material culture—provides privileged paths of access for us to an understanding of other people and other cultures, of other times and other places" (p. 6). As my next step down this "privileged path," the next section discusses the specific methods of research used to investigate angel in material culture, inspired by the work discussed thus far in this chapter. Following this section, I present the results of this research.

Angels in Millennium Era Material Culture

Methods for Material Culture Research

To investigate the link between material culture and the popularity of angels, I used two primary modes of investigation: observation and interviews. I observed four stores in three Canadian provinces that specialize in angel merchandise. These observations allowed me to see firsthand the products that are available as well as the merchandising of these products in their "natural context." As well, I interviewed an owner/manager in three of the four sites. As both of the research methods included human participants at some level, I required ethics approval from the University of Alberta to conduct this part of the research program. (See Appendix D for the Ethics Approval Form.)

In order to investigate the area of angel collectibles, I selected retail stores specifically devoted to angels. While most retail outlets broadly categorized as "gift shops," ranging from small entrepreneurial enterprises to multinational chains such as Hallmark, include angel merchandise, the angel merchandise does not necessarily have a place of particular significance within these stores. Rather, these stores carry wide range of assorted merchandise and depend on trends and fads for determining the availability of many of the products. As well, the proprietors of the stores likely have no particular knowledge about angels to impart. Further, the chain-store personnel in particular would not necessarily have a strong connection with their customers.

In angel-themed stores, the owners/managers I spoke with all had a great deal of specialized knowledge about angels in general and their angel-themed products in particular. All four outlets I visited had women as owners and/or managers, as well as salesclerks, and they seemed to identify closely with their mainly female patrons, establishing personal relationships. Furthermore, proprietors professed genuine enthusiasm for my project, and they treated me with a great deal of kindness. Despite this support, I found executing the interviews rather difficult. I did assure the participants that I would do my utmost to maintain their anonymity and that they could at any time opt out of particular questions or the interview in general, but participants at times acted reluctant to participate despite their verbal agreement.

For example, one owner agreed quite willingly to participate, and she gave me ready access to her store for observations. When I attempted to arrange an interview, she said she would like the questions in advance to discuss with her Human Resources Director. I was happy to provide the questions to her, though after repeated phone calls that garnered repeated polite requests for postponement of the interview for various reasons, I decided not to conduct the interview. As well, one person eagerly spoke with me in person when I entered her store for the first time, and she provided detailed and insightful commentary. When I later attempted to contact her to ask some additional questions, she elected not to return my phone calls. Another owner agreed to the interview, and though it took some time to arrange, she did eventually participate. And, while she provided a wealth of detailed information on the phenomenon of angels and the retail industry, she tended to discuss the issues seemingly most important to her, rather than provide direct answers to my questions. Of the three interviews I conducted, only one occurred as smoothly as I would have liked. The first time I spoke to this woman, she very agreeably arranged an interview a few days from our initial conversation. She participated actively in the interview, providing thoughtful answers. She also encouraged other staff members to talk with me, and she expressed interest in seeing my final product.

I can only speculate on possible reasons why I encountered these difficulties. First, I conducted the interviews during the summer months, a busy retail time for tourist locations, where most outlets were located. Second, the owners may have had mixed feelings about the interviews, on the one hand feeling obligated to participate and on the other feeling uncomfortable sharing information vital to their businesses. Third, they may have seen no apparent reward in participating in an academic study, seeing little potential for financial or other gain. Despite these challenges, however, the interviews elicited a great deal of applicable information on the phenomenon of angel culture as well as insight into the roles of producers, distributors, and consumers of these products.

For the interviews, I used a series of predetermined, open-ended questions to the store owner/managers (See Appendix E). While these questions shaped the interview, I did not ask these questions in rigid order, as the participants would often determine the course of the interview with the information they chose to provide. For example, when answering one question, a participant might also discuss another question I had planned to ask, making the asking of that question unnecessary. Similarly, their experiences often led me to ask follow-up questions to clarify information. When participants requested, I provided the questions in advance and in one case conducted the interview by phone for convenience. This arrangement occurred because of time constraints on the part of the owners/managers and to allow one interviewer prior consultation with the organization's Human Resources Director. I did not tape the interviews, as I believe the presence of a tape machine inhibits participants' answers. Rather, I took careful written notes and transcribed these notes immediately following the interview. Hortense Powdermaker (1950) advocated this interview method as the best way to get candidates—in her case, film industry people in Hollywood—to speak candidly, and I have used it successfully in the past on another research project. Although contemporary technology has made tape recorders much less obtrusive, owing to the challenges I experienced in securing research subjects, I elected not to use a tape recorder for these interviews to help set the rather tentative participants at ease. I opted instead to take notes during the interviews and fill in the details of the notes just after the interviews. While I recognize that notetaking without taping does allow for the possibility of losing some information, I ultimately made this choice based on my perception that creating a relaxed interview environment would prove more important than the permanence of audio taped data. In setting up the actual interviews, I visited all the stores in person and met the interview subjects in advance. I then prepared the interview responses in text format by grouping together relevant and similar answers. I also looked for opportunities to make connections between the data from the interviews and the observations, as well as my research of angels in historical literature.

For the observations, I spent time in each store, on one or two occasions each. I conducted the observations at "slow" periods to minimize potential interactions with customers in the stores, as I did not wish to intrude upon these patrons, but rather observe unobtrusively the store merchandise. During my observations, I took extensive notes on the types and descriptions of products, as well as information about the companies that manufacture the products. I also had the opportunity to collect print information about some of the products, and I was later able to use this information when writing up my observations. When examining the products, I also noted information about the layout or merchandising of the products in the stores.

In analyzing my data, I looked for connections between the observations and (1) the historical literature review, and (2) the material culture issues in this chapter. For example, when describing a portrayal of an angel, I drew comparisons to the portrayal of an angel, I drew comparisons to the portrayal of angels in religious texts and art through the ages. Similarly, I made connections between the merchandise and issues such as the role of material culture and identity formation and communicating social status.

Angel Retail Store Owners

As previously mentioned, I interviewed the owners of three angel-themed retail outlets, in three Canadian provinces. The interviews took place between June and September, 2000, and I conducted two in person and one by phone. The phone interview took place after I visited the store in person and met with the owner. She could not give the interview at that time, but she agreed to a later phone interview.

The three stores whose owners I interviewed opened their businesses since 1994, indicating particular relevance of the stores in the millennium era context. Further, this timing resembles that of the angel films and television programs previously mentioned, suggesting correspondence between these related forms of angel cultural products.

The owners opened their stores for similar reasons, although their background in the retail sector differed markedly. One storeowner has a background in social work and business, and she sees the store as a logical extension of these two experiences. The business/marketing background enables her to oversee the administrative/managerial aspects of the store, while the social work experience aids her ability to connect with her customers. She sees these customers as often "needing healing" in some way when they enter the store. For example, she told me of a woman who lost a loved one. The woman, who had not previously been to the store, came to the store during the crisis. As the owner stated, "Of course, you would come to the place where there are angels, " indicating that the woman sought out the store for emotional reasons. The owner herself opened the store following a divorce. The owner also said that she opened the store because she "experiences" angels all the time, and this led to the retail element of the store as well as the angel readings she formerly conducted in the store to inform people about their guardian angels. She said she no longer does these angel readings, as she does not have enough time.

Another owner said that she opened the stores as a "service to humanity," after consulting spiritualists and psychics to determine what she should do with her time. Her background in the human services gave her the people skills for the business, and she did business research before opening the store. This research, she says, enabled her to "[catch] the wave right at the top" of its popularity. She opened the store when she was 50 years old, and she believes this influenced her style of approach. She doesn't focus on the business "24/7" as she might have had she started the business at an earlier time in her life.

One owner mentioned that she opened the store because she believes that traditional religion no longer works for many people because it is fear-based. In contrast, she maintains that angels are all about love, and thus they "melt resistance to religion." People who feel disenchanted with traditional religion, she believes, turn to angels because angels embody more desirable and positive elements of religion and spirituality. As well, she believes that many people who come into the store are not necessarily religious and initially seek out angel collectibles for non-religious reasons. Nonetheless, these "angels sneak into their lives," bringing with them religion and spirituality.

Another storeowner strongly emphasized the need for a good location for any retail operation. She has had a total of four sites for her angel stores, with two sites currently in operation. One site is exclusively angels and other giftware, while the other one sells a variety of merchandise including consignment clothing and furniture. The current location of the angel store, in a ground-level store in a gentrified downtown area, has proven the best. A previous location in a second-floor site resulted in less traffic. Issues such as parking continue to affect her businesses, and a venture in a smaller town was not entirely successful. Similarly, one owner doesn't think her location, in a relatively low socio-economic neighborhood with "gentrification" possibilities, is ideal. She had wanted to locate the store elsewhere, but she didn't have much choice for availability.

One owner was brought up in a strictly religious environment, so religion was always a part of her life. Several years ago, on a leave of absence from her previous career in the human services field, she read a magazine article by Norman Vincent Peale about angel encounters. She believes she has had angel encounters, and decided that she wanted a new career that was both enjoyable to her and one that brought benefits to other people. She believes the angel stores allow her to do this, as her customers are often in emotional situations following a birth or death when they seek out her merchandise.

All the owners did some sort of research before opening their stores. Before opening her own store, one of the owners visited two angel stores already in existence in Canada, and she met up with another owner I interviewed. The experienced owner then became a mentor of sorts for the new owner. As well, all of the owners have taken courses in business to help with the administrative and financial aspects of the store. Otherwise, one owner claims that much of her research has involved "trial and error," by trying new locations, merchandise, etc., and deciding what works and what doesn't. For example, she was seeking a way to bring more traffic into her store, and through a mutual friend she met a woman who did "angel readings". Although the "angel reader" was not doing this activity professionally, the storeowner encouraged her to do the readings one day a week in the store. This partnership has grown, and the two women now seek to establish a women's center or spiritual store in one store location, which would include reflexology and other resources for women. This business may eventually be sold to allow for primary focus on the angel store.

All three of the stores do little in the way of formal advertising; they rely on word-of-mouth advertising to spread the word about their stores. Public relations such as newspaper articles also help create interest in the stores. As well, two of the three stores have websites, and a website may possibly be in the works for the third store. One site gives basic store information, such as location, hours, and available services, while another site focuses on selling products. This website connects to the "e-bay" auction service, as well as allowing on-line sales to take place through the store. While the website sales have been minimal, the owner perceives this as an effective advertising tool. Rather than selling all merchandise on-line, when she would rather people come into her store, she reserves the e-bay service for more unusual items.

All stores feature predominantly angel merchandise, with some additional merchandise related to fairies, other collectibles, and alternative therapies. One store started with about 95% angel merchandise and expanded a bit, but the owner is currently in the process of returning it to focus mainly on angels. One owner explained the reason for the difficulty in selling only angel merchandise, as some merchandise must be purchased in angel and other motifs in order to obtain the minimum order requested by manufacturers. One store plans to introduce another "feature collectible," teddy bears. This will expand the merchandise line and also allow for an additional business, a gift-basket delivery service.

In a similar vein, one owner emphasized the importance of merchandising rights in the collectibles business. If a company (e.g. Ty, the "Beanie Baby" manufacturer) gives exclusive sales rights to a store, this guarantees a certain amount of business, which increases foot traffic that will help sell other merchandise. These companies can change their policies and agreements, however, and this will result in significant changes for any individual store.

As far as customers go, one owner reports that the division between personal and gift purchases is fairly evenly divided. Many people do buy gifts for events such as a birth or a death, or for people who are angel collectors. Other people buy things for themselves, either because they are collectors or because they seek some sort of emotional experience with something they purchase. She went on to say that many of her customers are female, and even her male customers often purchase products in the store as gifts for women. The other owners also emphasized their generally female clientele. This information reconciles with my own observations, as I saw only women in the stores during my visits.

At one location, both the storeowner and the angel reader acknowledged that one of their biggest challenges is getting good staff that provide excellent customer service.

While the storeowner initially relied quite a bit on family and friends, the continued success of the business has meant hiring outside employees. Another owner has two family members working in the store alongside her. Two of the three owners have family members helping them with electronic commerce.

One owner plans to bring in other angel readers in order to provide customers with different perspectives. She mentioned that certain customers will "resonate" with certain readers more than others will, so providing more readers will provide more opportunities for customers to establish good connections with a reader. She reports that the reading customer base has changed somewhat during the six months it has been at the store. Initially a lot of young people (teenagers) came for readings, and they asked questions about heaven and deceased pets, and they wanted descriptions of the angels. The reader found teenagers challenging to read because although they have "strong energy," they have "no patterns." Currently, most of the customers are women of various ages; she has had only one male customer. Many of these women have challenges in their lives, such as dysfunctional marriages, and the reader sometimes suggests they need a counselor more than an angel reader. The women's center venture would perhaps include a list of counselors and other resources for people. Recently, she has had a number of requests for readings of animals, including a horse and a cat. She tells these people that she "will try" but is not experienced in these types of readings. She consults people in other fields, such as holistic medicine, if she feels she needs assistance with a reading. She does readings by phone only if the customer requests, but she feels Internet readings are "tacky" and "just about money."

The angel reader sees the readings as a tool to give people an idea of what paths their lives may take. She emphasized, however, that people always have free will to change paths. Also, she emphasized that she does not do channeling of spirits, and that she is somewhat skeptical of channeling. She has also been encouraged to charge more money but is reluctant to do so. Her $20/hr fee is fair, she feels, because she exchanges a service for money. She doesn't want to charge more, though, as she noted that a store employee who makes $6.50 per hour would have to work several hours to pay the $150 and more per hour that others charge. She also believes that some readers (psychics, etc.)

rely more on rational clues such as nonverbal communication than on spiritual messages. She says she isn't always good at "reading people" in this more rational way. To develop her skills, she has taken a psychic development course, and she attends a spiritualist church occasionally.

This reader requests people have specific questions for their angel readings. The reader acknowledged that some people are disappointed with their reading, usually because they did not get the answer they wanted or they asked a question they had already answered for themselves. She also said the angels do not answer some questions, and the angels say that the issue is "not in their department."

One owner strongly believes that stores with angel-type themes will continue to be popular because she sees that people are in great need of some sort of spirituality in the shadow of the retreat of traditional religion. She cited the *Oprah Magazine* as an example illustrating this trend. She sees the magazine as focused on spirituality and self-healing, and notes that the first issue of the magazine sold out within 24 hours. In addition to the purely angel-themed products, the store features therapeutic merchandise such as chakra oil and jewelry alleged to have healing properties. Another owner and the angel reader agreed that the reason their businesses are successful is that people are searching for spirituality in the world. This owner believes that many people are "not alone, but lonely," and look to angels for comfort. They also believe the popularity of shows like *Touched by an Angel* is also a reason why people seek out their store and the readings. As well, they see "old time religion" as focusing on control and fear, not on more positive aspects. The reader sees that people are looking for things that are "softer...warm and fuzzy" as people are so busy. They are looking to feel good, and they may be looking for a catharsis of some sort. While she does acknowledge that cherub collectibles were a fad, she perceives angels as offering a longer-term popularity. She sees organized religion as not important in many people's lives, as they are looking for a love-based sort of spirituality. Instead, people want a spirituality that is compassionate and caring. She sees the "technical" aspects of organized religion as becoming increasingly less important, and she also sees people embracing a cross-religion spirituality. Rather than focusing on differences, such as terminology (God, Higher Power, Spirit, and Source), people focus on similarities (community, kindness).

One owner, however, admits that she only plans to operate the business for a limited time, and then she will leave the store to pursue other interests. She said that she didn't intend to make money with the store, and she doesn't need the money it brings in. While she did not indicate whether she plans to sell the business, give it to a family member, or simply close it down, her acknowledgment that her involvement with the store will end within a specific time frame could suggest she believes that the angel retail business has a limited shelf life.

Overall, I believe these women created and maintain their businesses for positive reasons, including but not limited to the possibility of financial success. They chose to open angel stores, rather than other retail sites, because of their personal spiritual beliefs and experiences and their perception that angels help people in a variety of ways. They also show strong support for other people in their communities, through enterprises such as the planned women's spiritual center and other community support. As well, while they did not report anticipated drops in business, they have the foundation for developing their merchandise themes and businesses dependent on changing times. I would not expect or want them to tell me that angel stores are merely a passing fad, but I did observe other merchandise and services available at the stores that could be expanded depending on customer demands. The owner of multiple stores indicated that two of the store locations were not effective, which may support the notion that these types of stores do not have the potential for longevity. At the same time, the storeowners espoused a firm belief in the public's desire for spirituality in their lives, particularly forms of spirituality that embrace positive emotions (compassion) over negative ones (fear).

To support the data gleaned from these interviews, I also analyzed the merchandise sold by angel-themed retail stores. The next section of this chapter presents these results, which also build upon the interview data.

Angel Retail Merchandise

For this segment of my research, I observed the merchandise in four angel-themed retail stores across Canada. At three of these stores, I interviewed the storeowners, and the fourth storeowner initially agreed to participate in an interview but was unable to complete the interview. She was supportive of my on-site research, however.

Three of the four stores are located in urban centers, close to other giftware and houseware stores, and the fourth is in an upscale shopping mall. The stores also range in appearance from very darkly furnished and elegant to light and sparsely decorated. One store clearly is a "lean" operation. A relative provided the financial backing for the store, and a massage therapist shares the retail space with an office in the rear of the store in order to assist with costs. According to a publicity piece I read at the store, the furnishings were purchased used at a discount, and the displays include hand-lettered inspirational signs. Located in a newly trendy, gentrified area of the city, the store does a steady year-round business, as do all the stores. They are of course busier during the Christmas shopping season and during summer holidays.

Typical merchandise categories present at all the retail sites include figurines, books and cards, paintings and prints, clothing and jewelry, and housewares such as candleholders and frames. More unique and specialized merchandise also appeared at the stores. For example one store sold "Angelic Waters," a box of healing bath crystals.

While most of the merchandise is generally non-denominational, there are significant reminders of the Judeo-Christian traditions, such as crosses and Biblical quotations. Two of the stores had dedicated year-round Christmas sections. Angels are sometimes depicted in the nativity scene mentioned in the New Testament. Beyond this Judeo-Christian focus, one store had a small section of Native spiritual items, though this included only birds as winged creatures. Two of the three stores included healing stones and crystals, potentially associated with alternative religion and spirituality. One store had a "gazing ball" intended to attract good spirits and keep away evil ones, though this seemed more a novelty decorator item than an item associated with any particular form of spirituality.

The collectibles depict angels in many ways, from very realistic and lifelike photographs to highly stylized ornaments. Popular colors in the depictions include white, gold, and silver, and glitter or sparkles are used extensively. The physical depictions of the angels fall into three basic categories: adult women, children, and animals. Other categories, such as adult males and older adults, are also represented, but much less commonly.

The adult women appear to be the most common representation of angels, especially in the figurine category. These adult women are usually Caucasian, with light hair and eyes, though other racial representations (African, Asian, Hispanic and Aboriginal) are also available. For example, the Angel Princess line by Enesco depicts a series of darkly colored angels that are tall, thin, and sleek. Other lines have ethnic angels that differ from the white angels only in skin color; for example, a white angel with a baby in her arms will look identical to a black angel with a baby in her arms, in terms of characteristics such as facial features, clothing, and pose.

Generally, the women angels seem to be portrayed in a manner consistent with the North American beauty ideal for women, as slim, yet bosomy, with fine, even features and long, flowing hair. They are also youthful, appearing as unlined "twenty-somethings." The female angels are clothed in long, usually pastel, robes or dresses, with "ethnic" variations such as African patterned robes. Their wings are prominent and usually feathery, and some have haloes. They are portrayed as sitting or standing, and they may be engaged in activities such as making music, or they may appear with children or animals such as birds. If named, such as the Seraphim Classics from Roman, Inc., they typically have feminine names such as "Seraphina" or "Evangeline." While the angels may be classified as "Classical" realistic representations, there are many angels who appear to resemble Greek gods. For example, one figurine is described as a replica of the goddess Nike.

The children angels may be either male or female, and there seems to be a wider variety of racial/ethnic representations in the depiction of children than adults. The children usually have short, curly hair, with light or dark coloring. Like the adult females, the children appear in robes and have feathered wings, and occasionally haloes. And, the children often appear with animals or playing musical instruments. One line, "Snowbabies" shows children in white, hooded, fuzzy snowsuits with wings on the back.

These child angels are quite different than "cherubs," which appear as chubby toddlers swathed in a small strip of gauze around the midsection, although both types of collectibles are whimsical portrayals. These cherubs are white, and they have curly hair. They have wings, but no haloes usually. Occasionally, a cupid with arrows would be depicted. As well, some cherubs were depicted in the "Victorian" sense, as bodiless heads with wings attached at the neck. As one owner noted, these cherubs are more "faddish" than other types of angels and are currently less popular and available than other angels.

Other human representations of angels are significantly less common than the adult females in my observations. I observed several adult male representations, usually of the archangels, traditionally perceived as male. The Seraphim Classics line, for example, includes Gabriel. Like the female angels, this representation of Gabriel is youthful, Caucasian, slim and light colored. He, too, sports a robe and wings and long hair. One depiction of the archangel Michael shows him as a warrior, with body armor. Another line, the Tom Rubel Studio Collection, presents "retired angels." These figurines are portrayed as older Caucasian adults (male and female), with gray hair. They usually wear street clothes, and they are depicted in a variety of roles such as fisherman, golfer, doctor, firefighter, handyman, and a bingo player.

As far as the animal angels, they include cats, dogs, bears, and cows most prominently, as well as pigs and rabbits. These depictions include figurines, ornaments, or cards, and they range from very realistic representations to more stylized, even cartoonish, representations. These animal angels may wear human garb, or they may have their animal coats. They have wings, sometimes feathered, and they may wear haloes.

The literature sold at the stores ranges from general books on angels (e.g. stories of angelic encounters) to more specifically religious works, usually Judeo Christian. Other books include journals with pictures of angels and inspirational sayings. There are also greeting cards and "angel cards," a pack of cards with words that a person randomly selects from each day to focus on a particular word or idea. Another product was a "wish box," where one would put slips of paper with wishes written on them. One store had a selection of CDs with angel-related instrumental music.[30]

The personal wear items include jewelry, such as pins, necklaces—including the add-an-angel that lets the wearer purchase any number of jeweled angels to hang on a chain, and earrings. One breast cancer pin displays a pink ribbon intertwined with wings. As well, the stores sell wearable items such as t-shirts, aprons, and hats. In particular, I noticed a hat with the saying "Angels believe in you" on its front.

The housewares include frames, wallhangings, pictures, prints, plates, candle holders, stained glass ornaments, clocks, lawn ornaments, and nightlights. One line, the Betsey Cameron "fotofresco" collection, includes posters of children photographed to look like angels. One stores sells a survival kit with candles and matches with angel phrases on the box. To declare angelic allegiance outside the home, the store provides bumper stickers, keychains, and pens. One store offers a book of punch-out angel cards, including a parking meter angel, that one could use to adorn environments outside the home such as the car. Also, one store sells a series of auto visor clips and dashboard ornaments. This implies a special need for angel presence when driving.

A number of types of merchandise would be best classified as "giftware." This included playing cards, soap, chocolates, and patterns for craft angels. Purchasers would likely give this merchandise as gifts or use the items to make gifts for others.

One store had a great deal of baby-related merchandise. This included figurines, frames, magnets, and baby jewelry. There was also a "memories box" to metaphorically store childhood memories. As well, the store sells blankets, spoons, and birth announcement teddy bear angels depicted in blue and pink.

The "Guardian Angel" motif is very common in the collectibles I observed. All of the stores sell guardian angel pins, ranging from pins with different birthstones to guardian angel golfer pins. Many sports, i.e. biking, and occupations, i.e. police officers, have guardian angel merchandise dedicated to them. And, of course, the guardian angels keep a special eye on children, and children themselves can serve as guardian angels. Some guardian angels are very human in their appearance, and they seem directed at specific types of people. These angels, usually female, include a pregnant figure eating pickles and ice cream, a coupon clipper, a bride angel, and a soccer player. I also saw a male bowling angel.

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[30] As I was unable to listen to the CDs, I cannot really speculate on what the "angel-related" music would sound like, though a CD was playing in the store at the time. It sounded like light classical music, with lots

Some merchandise at the stores is dedicated to fairies. Similar to the angel merchandise, the stores sell more female fairy merchandise than male fairy merchandise. As well, the fairies are depicted more frequently as children or teenagers than adult. Their wings tend to be thinner and clearer, and of course they have no haloes. They wear filmy, knee-length tunics, usually, in pastels.

In general, the merchandise in the store presents angels in a manner consistent with artistic representations in post-Renaissance painting. The angels are female, Caucasian, and young. They wear flowing robes and wings, and occasionally haloes. The pre-Renaissance art, of course, portrayed chiefly male angels with robes, wings, and haloes or nimbi. These angels appeared in religious contexts almost exclusively. While the stores do offer some other representations, such as men and older adults, these are significantly less common than the female representations. The collectibles construct child angels in a somewhat whimsical fashion, almost representative of the cupids or cherubs of Romantic era art. The range of merchandise allows for personal collecting and purchasing for gifts. It also enables people to surround themselves with angels, whether on their person, in their homes, and even in their cars. This physical positioning of angelic merchandise thus provides an opportunity for collectors to publicly demonstrate their beliefs.

Conclusions

While I did find several consistencies between my research and the ideas expressed by material culture scholars, one limitation of my methods emphasized a restriction in the conclusions I can draw. Since my research was limited to observation and interviews with storeowners, I gained only a little insight into how the consumers of angel products actually interact with these products. While the interviews did produce information that allows for intelligent conjecture, it remains conjecture nonetheless.

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of stringed and wind instruments.

Thus, what I discuss here in terms of the consumer's role in the production/distribution/consumption process in large part involves theoretical musings that would need further study to make any practical conclusions.

As well, the multitude of signifiers that I observed in the merchandise in the four stores rendered detailed semiotic analysis of every signifier quite challenging, and a representative sample might not have adequately captured the breadth of symbols. Rather, I illustrate here a selection of the types of signifier/signified relationships that I observed, with emphasis on the wider contextual meanings of these significations.

In very general terms, the typical signifier/signified relationship departs in several ways from the typical Judeo-Christian portrayal of asexual yet masculine ethereal creatures serving as God's messengers. Rather, many of the collectibles show little reflexive awareness of the context of angel imagery in historical literature and culture, although some do mirror Biblical and artistic representations. More commonly, the collectibles border on whimsical, incorporating contemporary signifiers that will resonate with a broad swath of consumers and engender repeat purchases.

Some collectibles do, unmistakably, include Judeo-Christian signifiers such as Bible quotes, nativity scenes, archangel characterizations, and to a lesser extent, crosses. This portrayal of angels with Biblical quotes or contexts also resembles pre-Renaissance artistic renderings. Clearly, the dominant religious reading exerts at least some influence in the mainstream collectibles market.

Many angel representations, however, incorporate signifiers more common to artistic representations of the Renaissance and subsequent eras. First of all, the majority of collectible angels are signified as female, youthful, and attractive, as were many angels in post-Renaissance art. As well, cupids and cherubs feature in the contemporary collectibles industry, as they did in post-Renaissance art. In the Renaissance era, these departures from solely Judeo-Christian significations of angels symbolized the departure of the church from its central role in people's lives. In the millennium era context, these significations produce a negotiated reading that includes some signifiers of the Judeo-Christian tradition, such as wings, while also importing other signifiers potentially inconsistent with Judeo-Christian representation, such as the focus on the feminine nature of angels. This signification suggests that for many people, the dominant religion must include some updated elements for people to incorporate religion or spirituality into their own lives. Further, the presence of cupids and cherubs signifies a lighthearted, playful nature of angels, in part inconsistent with the Judeo-Christian role of angels in judgment. Instead, it seems as though people would rather have angels signify positive or playful aspects, rather than more negative or ponderous ones.

Further, while most angels are feminine, Caucasian, and youthful, the diversity of angels in terms of race, age, and gender further signify a deconstruction of sorts of the patriarchal focus of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Of course, this diversity also signifies diversity in the marketplace, as consumers may seek to purchase angel collectibles that resemble themselves and their loved ones. This also reflects the ability of producers to "narrowcast" their products for small segments of the population, unlike the broadcast necessities of television and film.

Most collectible angels include signifiers that emphasize "lightness," such as white or light coloring, flowing robes, and white or gold accessories. These elements signify the goodness and purity of angels, albeit in a potentially ethnocentric way. The elements also signify the celestial nature of angels, as physically lighter than their heavier human counterparts. Some angels include very human signifiers for clothing and accessories, while some angels include quite ethereal signifiers such as robes, wings, and haloes. The representation of angels in human guise symbolizes the desire for people to embrace an aspect of spirituality with a clearly human face, while the more celestial representations symbolize angels as a link with God or heaven. Taken collectively, this signifies the dual role of angels as heavenly inhuman creatures as well as a divine bridge with humanity.

Finally, some signifiers emphasize the role of angels as guardians over people. A great number of products (pins, hats, etc.) signify physical guardianship over people. The frequency of baby-related merchandise featuring angel themes further signifies angels as guardians of children. While the Bible does mention angels as guardians, this construction again distills a positive element of angel images out of portrayals that include many negative elements.

These significations do indicate that the marketing of angels includes Judeo-Christian signifiers mixed with signifiers more common to post-Renaissance portrayals, representing updated imagery that resonates with consumers' personal belief systems and their consumption patterns. Beyond these specific examples, though, an intriguing aspect of the process of signification with angel merchandise involves taking the signifiers collectively and analyzing what they signify for the consumers of the products. Thus, the conclusions on this section of the empirical research turn now to focus more on social processes such as identity formation than the specifics of the angel portrayals.

As mentioned in the literature review, Muensterberger (1994) asserted that people collect for emotional reasons, such as loneliness. In speaking with the storeowners, I found this to be consistent with the purchasers of angel products. While Muensterberger focused more on the process of collecting, I believe the emotional satisfaction people get from purchasing angel products typically comes from the individual product itself, rather than any complete collection. The storeowners emphasized the healing and love that angels symbolize, and they cited this as a reason why angel merchandise appeals to customers. This resembles the Durkheimian notion of totemism, and Muensterberger's (1994) assertion that collectors assign power to particular objects. While I do not know whether people use angel merchandise in specific rituals, the storeowners emphasize the power people believe to be inherent in these products.

I am uncertain, however, whether Muensterberger's (1994) assertion that ownership of collectibles lends a sense of control to the owner applies fully in this situation. While I believe people would like to control the power they perceive angels to have, my discussion with the angel reader emphasized that some angel believers do not seek to control angels as much as coexist with them. Of course, the plethora of books giving people advice on how to communicate with angels does rest on the assumption that people can control this communication, at least to the degree of whether it happens or not. Some of the customers of the angel reader, however, seem to perceive angels as having a great deal of power, and they seem respectful of that perceived power.

The role of angel collectibles in creating and maintaining personal identity seems apparent, particularly in my observations of the products available at the stores. Elsner and Cardinal (1994) and Csikzentmihalyi (1993) emphasized how collectibles form a "mirror of self" that serves in this identity function. At a very basic level, purchasing and collecting angel products allows people to symbolize their belief in angels. This signification can happen through the body (by wearing angel clothing or accessories) and through the home (by displaying angel figurines). And, although my reading of works on material culture did not mention this possibility, this identity management can happen in other environments, such as a person's car or workstation. According to my interviews with storeowners, collectors typically surround themselves with a system of angel images, including collectibles, accessories, choices in television programs, and purchases of angel readings. Perhaps the television programs and films discussed in the previous chapter even help motivate the consumers of these angel products to purchase the merchandise.

In a related vein, Baudrillard (1968) focused more particularly on the role consumption plays in identity management. This is also consistent with Veblens's (1953[1899]) notion of conspicuous consumption. Through the consumption of angel products, and more typically repeated consumption of these products, identity management as an angel believer occurs. While people may use these collectibles in some sort of ritual, many collectibles have little or no apparent instrumental value. They take on their most significance during the purchase, rather than in subsequent interaction with the purchaser. To sustain this significance, the collector must continue to collect. Thus, the angel stores can maintain a steady business with a constantly changing slate of products.

Muensterberger (1994) also emphasized the role perceived deprivation has in collecting, and I believe this in part drives people to consume angel products. The purchasing of these little luxuries, usually priced below $30, allows people to feel as if they are indulging themselves in an appropriate and, better yet, spiritual way. Just as people purchase a $4 cup of Starbucks coffee, perceiving it as a better option than drinking alcohol, people purchase an angel collectible, thinking it better than collecting pet rocks. As well, purchasing angels at angel-themed retail stores enables these predominantly female customers to support a woman-owned business in many cases.

In fact, customers often develop relationships with the storeowners, as my research revealed. Metcalf (1991) emphasized the organic nature of the creation of popular art, and while my research did not extend to the creators of this art, his ideas apply as well to distributors. One owner mentioned a woman dealing with the death of a loved one who came to her store for the first time because she wanted to be surrounded by angels. This woman has since become a regular customer, due in large part to her experience with the storeowner. The extension of services such as alternative healing and angel reading also allows for an expanded relationship between the customers and the owners, as this allows for more interaction than merely purchasing products. The female owners seem to identify rather closely with their customers.

Another important element in why people choose to consume angel products involves the role these products have in constructing ideas of religion and spirituality. While the products may play a ritualistic part in consumers' lives, they may also serve as simply tangible reminders of spirituality. McDannell (1995) suggested that touching (or experiencing with any sense) material objects can, in fact, stimulate a cognitive or emotional response to spirituality and religion. Both storeowners emphasized that the popularity of their products comes out of peoples' need for spirituality in their lives. They believe that purchasing angel merchandise enables these people to connect somehow with their spiritual side, whether a traditional, organized religion or another form of spirituality. This contention seems consistent with McDannell's (1995) assertion.

My research also reflected the nature of material culture. Popular art in the form of collectibles enjoys accessibility across socioeconomic strata, while elite art typically has an accessibility (certainly in terms of purchase) only in the upper socioeconomic strata. The price range of collectibles, starting at about $2 in my observation and ranging to several hundred dollars, with most products below $30, makes these products accessible to most people. The storeowners also emphasized their diversity of their customers. While they are more female than male, they range in age from teenagers to retirees and apparently come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds.

Finally, the economic issues in angel material culture work in conjunction with these social, personal, and spiritual factors. Obviously, owners opened these stores and the stores continue to exist for economic reasons; the owners seek to make a profit out of their enterprise. They price their merchandise carefully, to maximize this profit, and they market and merchandise their stores to continue to expand and develop their customer base. The merchandise they offer also indicates (at least nominally) angels that represent a broad cross-section of consumers. Beneath this economic motivation, however, the storeowners emphasized clearly spiritual reasons for their choice in retail stores. Angels are important in both of their lives, and they appeared to have a sincere willingness or even a calling to bring angels to other peoples' lives. Of course the stores and the owners alike can be criticized for commercializing and commodifying religion and spirituality, but in my interviews and observations, certainly the customers experience a spiritual gain through their purchases in these stores.

While I cannot definitively argue whether or not angel collectibles and angel themed stores will have longevity in the marketplace, I can make some informed speculation regarding their continued presence. The late 1990s seem to have represented an apex of sorts for angels in the collectibles industry. This was the time when the stores enjoyed the most popularity, after their start-up periods. This pre-Millennium context seemed to support belief in angels quite strongly. In the intervening year or so, retailers seem prepared for a leveling off in their businesses, indicated by their desire to expand, alter, or leave their businesses in the next few years. This leveling off might result, for example, in fewer people patronizing the stores, yet a core of "angel believers" seem poised to continue seeking out angel collectibles. The continued popularity of the television program *Touched by an Angel*, for example, supports this continued, if somewhat diminished, trend. The representation of the angels and the comments of storeowners support the idea that some people will continue to seek out angels as part of their religious or spiritual lives. For these people, angels may serve as a supplementary element to a belief in traditional Christianity or a significant role in a hybrid form of spirituality.

Again, I could easily dismiss angel collectibles and their distributors and consumers as kitschy and faddish. In doing so, however, I would be dismissing something very important to these chiefly female consumers. Feminine culture such as soap operas and romance novels has been dismissed as trivial, but researchers such as Ien

Ang (1985) and Janice Radway (1984) have brought attention to the meaning making that these cultural products bring to women's lives. In the same vein, my research has shown the important role angel material culture has in such areas as emotional healing, identity management, and spiritual development. I find these concerns, in contrast, much harder to dismiss as immaterial.

CHAPTER 6:
(RE)CREATING ANGELS: FANSHIP, IDENTITY & SUBJECTIVITY

Introduction

As the earlier chapters have indicated, the presence of angels in cultural artifacts and the nature of the characterizations of angels in these artifacts reflects profoundly on the culture from which these artifacts emerged. The angels in recent films and television shows, as well as in today's gift shops, in many ways have less to do with "traditional" religion and more to do with how people in millennium era culture interpret and reproduce notions of religion, spirituality, and angels in a context of increased secularization and epochal shifts.

This chapter further examines the touch of angels on contemporary culture by investigating the presence of angels on the Internet. Certainly "angel admirers" consume cultural products across the range of television, film, collectibles, and websites.[31] And, although website angel admirers may very well consume the other products, for the purposes of this chapter, I focus on the Internet as the site for fanship with implications for subjectivity. Angel admirers create angel subjectivities and also appear to identify with these angel subjectivities in a very personal way through their communications with other angel admirers on the websites. The ability of websites to "narrowcast" to a specific audience, unlike the broadcasting necessary for television and film, makes possible a variety of possible subject-positions for website users. Further, as with the angel retail store owners, the producers of these websites in many cases appear to identify very closely with the people who visit the sites, and indeed the construction of these sites very likely reflects some sense of connection between producer and consumer.

Although the scope of this project demanded the research focus on the websites and their producers, I do make inferences about the consumers of the sites as well. Whether the producers are an institution (e.g. the Catholic Church) or individuals, they all produce the sites for fans to consume. As well, analyzing the semiotic nature of these Internet texts necessarily involved reception of the texts during the research process. This reception, coupled with the opportunities for consumers to ask questions or make contributions to websites, illustrates how the categories of producer and consumer can collapse somewhat in the Internet medium. The power differential between producer and consumer still exists, of course, yet certainly not to the same degree as the other texts under investigation, owing to the more democratic nature of the Internet.

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[31] Although the language of the sociology of religion would suggest using the noun "adherents," I chose "admirers" in an attempt to add neutrality to this discussion. Assumptions about the religious character of these websites would not be appropriate, as there is not adequate factual information on this subject about the producers and consumers of these websites.

The chapter focuses on a semiotic analysis of five representative websites about angels. First, however, I begin with the most general area, fanship, and move to more focused elements of Internet community, fanship and consumption. Then, I discuss the more specific issues of subjectivity and identity on the Internet, particularly in relation to angelic imagery. Following this, I discuss the website cases used for this study and how website creators and users construct and consume these cyberspace angels.

In earlier chapters, from the theory/methodology discussion to the material culture discussion, this research project has emphasized the importance of contextualizing any media texts to include their production and consumption. In this vein, an understanding of "Fan Culture" serves as a necessary jumping-off point to begin to illuminate the "reception process" by which people consume Internet sites featuring angels.

Fan Culture: Real World and Virtual World

In his work *Textual Poachers*, a central work on fan culture, Henry Jenkins (1992) discussed how media fans seek out a "weekend-only world" as a response to perceived issues in society at large such as social disintegration (e.g. marital breakdown or declining support systems) and economic challenges (e.g. feeling underpaid or dissatisfied with cultural importance of money). Fans, according to Jenkins (1992), "establish a 'weekend-only world' more open to creativity and accepting of differences, more concerned with human welfare than with economic advance" (p. 282). He continued on to say that "[f]andom constitutes such a space, one defined by its refusal of mundane values and practices, its celebration of deeply held emotions and passionately embraced pleasures" (p. 283). While Jenkins (1992) acknowledged this "weekend-only world" hardly provides a more perfect place than the "real" world, he did assert that it provides a space for people to actively negotiate meaningfulness in a way that speaks to them personally. In this way, fandom can have an empowering influence on fans. Certainly the Internet in general and angel websites in particular can provide sites for this meaning negotiation.

For his area of inquiry, Jindra (1994) investigated and discussed the magnitude of *Star Trek* (ST) fandom in both cultural and commercial senses, which I see as a close parallel to angel fandom. Of course, the original ST and its progeny have substantial ratings for both male and female viewers. In addition, Jindra (1994) mentioned that in the last 25 years, fans have purchased $500 million in ST merchandise, along with books, magazines, and dictionaries with ST themes. As well, fan clubs, conventions and on-line discussion groups contribute to the collective identity of "Trekkies." These structured collectives show a fan culture more organized, centralized, and mobilized than the more nebulous group of angel admirers on the Internet.

Jindra's (1994) key thesis, however, focused on how ST fandom mirrors a "religious-type" movement. Jindra (1994) used ethnographic methods (interviews and participant observation) to examine ST fandom in both "real" and "electronic" communities.[32] He noted that contemporary western expressions of religion often exist outside the everyday experiences of most people, as we tend to perceive religion "institutionally." Thus, when religion becomes abstracted from this institutional format, we often fail to recognize it, such as with the case of ST (according to Jindra). Jindra (1994) called on Thomas Luckmann's theories of secularization and religion, asserting that the resistance of institutionalizing forces of religion have led to less institutionalized religious constructs, often pastiche forms of "New Age" spirituality. Thus, alternative forms of religion become "popularized," as people embrace everyday "religious" experiences such as ST fandom.

Specifically, Jindra (1994) likened ST to religious movements because of features of the ST discourse, such as:

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[32] He was deluged with people who called themselves "big fans," so he found a very willing pool of subjects. I, too, have found that as I discuss my dissertation topic of angels, many people come forward with their own angelic encounters and experiences.

- Emphasis on themes of paradise/utopia (in contrast to apocalyptic themes in some science fiction)
- Focus on other-worldly themes
- Portrayal of progressive and humanist ideals
- Depiction of the collaboration of different "peoples"
- Requirement of belief/faith in the form of "suspension of disbelief"
- Creation of a sense of community among discourse members

Ultimately, perhaps one can question whether ST fans and angel admirers see the Trek Universe (or the angel universe) as "real," or if they see them as "fiction." As well, the stigma of fandom exists, as with the stigma of religion that leads to persecution. Jindra (1994) concluded that ST has taken on the characteristics of what Robert Bellah calls a "civil religion."

Of course, fans of angels are not exactly the same as fans of a more discrete media "event" such as Star Trek. The term "fan" as applied to angel admirers overextends the traditional definition in a sense because of the spiritual connotation of angels as an object of adoration. At the same time, angel admirers fall short of the standards of more active fans (e.g. Star Trek fans who create alternative storylines) centered around one text (e.g. a television program). Nonetheless, some of the assumptions and stereotypes about fans may extend to angel admirers, at least superficially. Fans are often seen as (1) female and/or feminized; (2) placing inappropriate importance on devalued cultural material; (3) brainless consumers who buy anything as part of their fandom; and (4) unable to separate fact from fiction. These characteristics might also have some application towards believers in angels, as these fans are often female consumers of material and popular culture, whose fandom rests on their belief or faith. Whether fans channel their belief into the fantasy world of science fiction or the religious world of angels, their fandom rests essentially on belief in the intangible.

As the previous chapters have indicated, angel fandom can be expressed through particularly feminine forms of activities such as going to the movies to see films such as *City of Angels*, watching *Touched by an Angel* on television, or purchasing angel collectibles. In a contemporary extension of these fan activities, the Internet provides a site for people to express their fan-atacism as well as connect with and communicate with like-minded fans. In fact, fan culture is a particularly prominent facet of the Internet, though few scholars have written about this feature of contemporary culture thus far.

As I previously mentioned, in this chapter, I discuss my use of the Internet to study angels and angelic admiration, and Jenkins's (1992) discussion of how the Internet has contributed to the development of fan culture proved particularly enlightening to this project. First of all, he discussed that the Internet allows fans to collaborate with one another in a virtually simultaneous manner (Jenkins, 1992). These aspatial, asynchronous possibilities allow fans to create more complex theories, such as the reasons why certain people believe they encounter angels at certain points in their lives. As well, they allow angel admirers to compare their stories of alleged angel encounters with others and theorize about the nature of the existence of angels. Jenkins (1992) also pointed out that the Internet allows for an extended community, and thereby the affirmation or production of one's own beliefs through discussion with others. Thus, people who believe they have encountered an angel can seek legitimacy and corroboration for the encounter through comparing experiences with other Internet users.

The Internet also provides an appropriately "postmodern" venue for communication about a subject such as angels. For example, the computer-mediated world constructs a simulated environment, in the tradition of Baudrillard's simulacrum. As well, with its hypertextual constructions that allow disjointed meanderings from one website to another, the Internet creates a pastiche of images for its consumers. As Featherstone (1992) insisted, postmodern focus rests on the consumer, who can become empowered through new power formations supported in the Internet context. Finally, and perhaps most powerfully, the Internet can and does serve as a site of resistance, where many people outside the powerbloc can share ideas in a global context.

Expressions of angel fandom on the Internet should not be conceived of as particularly isolated activities that occur in a darkened den in front of a computer screen. Clerc (2000) wrote of Internet fandom, noting that Internet fans also participate in activities such as local clubs, fan circles, and conventions. In face, she wrote that "The majority of fans on-line participate in at least one fan activity aside from Net groups (82 per cent of women, 57 per cent of men) and many of them started fan activities before going on-line" (p. 224). Thus, an angel admirer who starts a website likely tuned in to the program *Touched by an Angel*, watched movies such as *City of Angels*, and purchased angel collectibles. Further, this angel admirer would likely have a strong sense of identification with the people who visit the website.

The preceding discussion of fan culture applies to any fan context, from "real" world fan clubs to virtual fan groups on the Internet. For a more complete understanding of the uniqueness of Internet fan communities, the next section discusses how these virtual social structures come into existence and allow for meaningful communication and the formation of social bonds.

The Social Construction of Internet Communities

Howard Rheingold's (1993) work *The Virtual Community* perhaps first defined this social construct that has become increasingly a presence in contemporary culture. Rheingold (1993) wrote that "virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (p. 5). The notion of community, taking this definition, thus has more to do with social bonds rather than physical proximity. Just as with other social structures, people use the Internet to form virtual communities for various reasons. Healy (1997) wrote that the Internet simultaneously satisfies our need for autonomy and connection, and it ensures we form a community with like-minded, not merely proximate, people. The community, thus, becomes quite homogenous.

Though Internet relationships and communities can provide these sorts of benefits for their users, these virtual bonds have drawbacks, too. Foster (1997) wrote that "the newfound ability to communicate with vast numbers of like-minded others, regardless of barriers of time and space, obscures the 'electronic' encephalization' (Baudrillard, 1988, 17) of ourselves at the expense of the other" (p. 27). He went on to say that "technology could be considered the root of the problem if one considers virtual communities a postmodern form of the spectacle—driving people indoors and making them think that virtual communities are real communities" rather than hyperreal ones (p. 31). As Tepper (1997) noted, virtual communities generally do not exist on a long-term basis.

Of course, virtual communities, by their very definition, call into question the ontological assumptions by which we define what we call the "real" world. As Robins (2000) wrote, "the new technological environments of virtual reality and cyberspace confuse the boundaries between internal and external worlds, creating the illusion that internal and external realities are one and the same" (p. 84-5). One can also see virtual communities as merely simulations of real communities, "preferably with a large dose of tradition and very little mess" (Wilbur, 2000, p. 50). This notion paints a picture of rather hollow, even sterile, virtual communities whose simulation makes them unreal.

On the other hand, Balsamo (2000) contradicted in a sense these sorts of assumptions when he wrote:

> What is becoming increasingly clear in encounters with virtual reality applications is that visualization technologies no longer simply mimic or *represent* reality—they virtually recreate it. But the difference between reality constructed in VR worlds and the reality constructed in the everyday world is a matter of epistemology, not ontology. They are both cultural as well as technological constructions, fully saturated by the media and other forms of everyday technologies. With respect to VR, it no longer makes sense to ask whose reality/perspective is represented in the various VR worlds, the industry, or the subculture; rather we should ask what reality is *created therein,* and how this reality *articulates relationships* between technologies, bodies, and cultural narratives. Where the first line of questioning assumes that 'perspective' and 'point of view' are the main channels of knowledge, the second line of questioning asserts that there is no singular reality to virtual reality, and that the 'realities' constructed therein embody the desires of those who program them (p. 495)

Nonetheless, conceiving of cyberculture as merely another element of other human culture may prove problematic. As Porter (1997) insisted, perhaps the social interactions and cultural forms of the Internet are unique, differentiating them from other cultural areas, forming a "hybridculture" that resembles, yet is not equivalent to, other areas of human culture (p. xvii). Of course, the lack of face-to-face communication that characterizes much cybercommunication differentiates cyberculture from other cultures, but common elements such as the centrality of discourse remain. Cyberculture differs from "real" culture in more discrete ways, too. For example, Jones (1999) noted that we could define a particular example of communication present on the Internet as coterminously interpersonal, group, organizational, and/or mass, a phenomenon not always possible in face-to-face interaction.

In attempting to understand the relationship between "real" and "virtual" communities, some scholars have come to see virtual communities as almost *spiritual* in their virtuality, a notion that fits well with the spiritual theme of this research project. This contention gains ground with the trend of secularization described in Chapter 2. As traditional organized religion loses its hold on society, alternative forms of spirituality begin to resonate more strongly. As well, people may begin to look for other formations of spirituality, in forms such as the "civil religion" of Star Trek or the virtual focus of the Internet.

To begin, in the introduction to Bell and Kennedy's *The Cybercultures Reader,* Kennedy (2000) asserted that the computer itself has become deified. As well, Wilbur (2000) suggested that the notion of a virtual community should be connected back to its religious roots. Just as a virtual cyberspace community exist whenever two or more users form a relationship, the Christian Church could (and was) said to exist "where two or three are gathered together in [Jesus'] name (Matthew 18:20)" (Wilbur, 2000, p. 10).

To expand upon this notion of the superiority of the spiritual/virtual self, virtual communities in some ways resemble "heavenly" communities because of the *potential* (realized or not) for a utopian vision to be played out in the cyber context. As Wilbur (1997) wrote, "the deepest roots of virtuality seem to reach back into a religious worldview where power and moral goodness are united in virtue" (p. 9). Looking forward, Fisher (1997) discussed Pierre Levy's work *Collective Intelligence*, writing that "Levy lays out an avowedly utopian program for a virtual society in which we would all take part in a democratic online collective intellect, in some respects a technolization of Rousseau's general will or even in some respects of a Hobbesian Leviathan, by taking on virtual 'angelic bodies'" (p. 124). Further, the opportunities afforded by cyberspace communities are very much idealized at times, as when people construct virtual identities for themselves that are much better than their "real" identities. As the next section will discuss, this idealization of society, as well as self, coalesces with the Lacanian notion of the mirror image.

Reflecting on this utopian notion of cyberspace, Robins (2000) somewhat pessimistically wrote, "Cyberspace is, according to the guruesque William Gibson, a 'consensual hallucination'" (p. 77). He went on to say, however, in a more positive note that, "the new technology promises to deliver its user from the constraint and defeats of physical reality and the physical body" (p. 81). Thus, the self becomes fragmented into two parts: spiritual (or virtual) and corporeal. This recognition of the duality of human nature, with the acknowledgment of spiritual superiority, forms an essential underpinning of the religious tradition, and an idea very much present on the Internet.

Perhaps, as Kroker and Kroker (2000) wrote:

> We are living in a decisive historical time: The era of the post-human. This age is typified by a relentless effort on the part of the virtual class to force a wholesale abandonment of the body, to dump sensuous experience into the trashbin, substituting instead a disembodied world of empty data flows (p.98).

In an equally cynical tone, Lupton (2000) wrote that, "in computer culture, embodiment is often represented as an unfortunate barrier to interaction with the pleasures of computing" (p. 479). He went on to say that, "in cyberwriting, the body is often referred to as the 'meat,' the dead flesh that surrounds the active mind which constitutes the 'authentic' self." (p. 479). Taking a more moderate stance, Stone (2000) discussed Frances Barker's notion that the body has become privatized. With more layers between the individual and public space, isolation makes manipulation more possible, and dress and home space have become more private. Communication became removed from the interpersonal sphere, first through pen and paper and later through technology. Nonetheless, the "virtual subject" is always (or nearly always, considering virtual supermodels such as Elite's Webbie Tookay) attached to a body, at some end (Stone, 2000).

This "virtual subject" rests at the center of the research of this project, as I focus on the construction of angel subjects and the ways that the Internet and these angel subjects impact website creators' and users' own identities. The next section lays out some of these notions of how identity and subjectivity become interlaced with the cyberspace experience, focusing on the role of angel websites in this process.

Identifying Angels: Personal Identity and Angelic Subjectivity on the Internet

As the previous sections have articulated, Internet websites create contemporary sites for fan activities. While angel admirers have a number of outlets for expressing their fanship, the Internet provides a potentially global forum for these fans to produce and consume their own fan culture. Since today's websites require little formal knowledge to create, the Internet provides a medium unlike television, film, or collectibles for fans to create and share their own cultural products, beyond the more institutionally prescribed modes for communicating. As well, the "weekend only world" the fan encounters on the Internet enables particular forms of virtual communities. Through interaction with the websites and other like-minded people, angel admirers may also experience their subjectivity in new and unique ways. Again, while the scope of this project required focus on texts and producers more than consumers, I do make inferences about consumption, consumers, and subjectivity. These inferences arise out of (1) the tendency for some website producers to identify closely with other users, (2) the potential for consumers to contribute to sites, and (3) the necessity of reception in analyzing the texts from a research perspective.

To begin, the "social construction of reality" theoretical tradition, on which I have based this project, provides an appropriate starting point for this discussion of identity and subjectivity on the Internet. As Spivey (1997) wrote, "constructivists view people as constructive agents and view the phenomenon of interest (meaning or knowledge) as built instead of passively 'received' by people whose *ways* of knowing, seeing, understanding, and valuing influence what is known, seen, understood, and valued" (p. 3). In the tradition of constructivism, individuals construct meaning, and dyads and small groups can work as collective agents. For example, they can write collaboratively, as it happens on websites that include the web author stitching together her own words with those words of contributors through chats, links, etc. Spivey (1997) called these partnerships and other interactions that create a collective meaning "distributed cognition" (p. 19).

The text-based nature of cyberspace necessitates understanding the centrality of the text to both the discourse and the subjects involved in creating and reproducing the discourse. Spivey (1997) asserted that in the process of writing, a social and constructed task, the writer brings to the writing situation issues such as audience consideration (discourse knowledge), relationships with others (such as collaborators), and knowledge of other texts (intertextuality). Collaborative writing may be as simple as getting a response from others, which often happens on websites where authors encourage emails, postings, and chats. What occurs, typically, Spivey (1997) called "discourse synthesis," by which writers reading multiple texts and creating their own transform these texts as they use and write about them. Ultimately, texts create author identity for those who read these texts, a notion of particular importance in the cyberspace context.

Spivey (1997) also drew parallels with her notions of the constructivist metaphor with other scholars. She cited Berger & Luckmann's notion of internal and external realities as in keeping with this metaphor. As well, she used Saussure's distinction between langue and parole as analogous with the social and individual, respectively. Further, she suggested that Saussure's preference for the synchronic over the diachronic, necessitating the contextualization of meaning in a particular time and place, as essential in the construction of meaning. This contextualization becomes increasingly problematic as the fragmentary nature of cyber-discourse occurs in asynchronous and aspatial "virtual" contexts.

The collective knowledge of a discourse community, such as that created through website communication, makes the creation of certain texts follow generic constructions and makes a preferred reading preferred, while of course leaving space for negotiated or resistant readings. Structuralism focuses on social knowledge, de-centering the individual. Post-structuralism, though, sees social knowledge as unstable and false, as a result of the heteroglossia characteristic of post-structuralist society.

The Internet allows for the blurring of humanity and technology, which by extension can influence subjectivity in the postmodern epoch. The notion of cyborg, perhaps associated most prominently with feminist scholar Donna Haraway (1991), involves humans and machines bound together through symbols such as words and images. According to Haraway (1991), the cyborg "transcends the earthly, the bodily, and the human: it is oppositional and utopian" (p. 150). In their discussion of cyborgs, Featherstone and Burrows (1997) focused on how cyborgs and "cyberpunk" (roughly, the alternative lifestyles afforded by Internet communities) involve the blurring of categories such as body/technology, mind/body, and human/machine.

The postmodern condition evidences the potential shifts in subjectivity possible through the Internet. As Jameson (1991) wrote, cyberpunk is "the supreme literary expression if not of postmodernism then of late capitalism itself" (p. 419). Likewise, Doug Kellner, according to Featherstone and Burrows (1995), found cyberpunk the ideal point of inquiry for comprehending the postmodern. Mark Poster (1995) saw that postmodernism can foster different forms of identity than those supported by modernity, with its focus on rationality, centeredness, autonomy, and stability. The postmodern subject, by contrast, is "unstable, multiple, and diffuse" (p. 87), a condition made imminently possible through virtual reality. Further, the postmodern subject, like the cyborg, disregards the flesh as "meat," supporting the idea of decentering of the self.

In addition to Haraway, a number of scholars have identified commonalities between feminism and virtual subjectivity. Plant (1995) argued for a natural relationship between women and computers as men fear and seek to contain both. Further, both "mimic" men, whether in edenic terms or by artificial intelligence. Lupton (2000) asserted that the cyborg has special importance to feminism because, for the cyborg, the body is not contained, just as women's bodies are "leaky," and a blurring between self and other occurs. Robins (1995) suggested that women may in fact become more familiar with Internet subjectivity than men because women have more experiences with the disguises it requires.

In a gender-neutral spirit, McRae (1997) wrote of creating identity through "virtual encounters," and though she focused on sexual encounters, her comments on identity formation can also apply to other situations. Of course, she noted that people can falsify identity (males pretending to be females), but she goes on to suggest that some of this embellishment is idealization. Self-descriptions typically involve fairly close adherence to societal ideas. McRae (1997) also noted that this role-playing is not necessarily false. Along the likes of the social construction of reality thesis by Berger and Luckmann, these constructed identities can become just as real as any other identity. Lupton (2000) also saw computer users' identities as potentially tied up with computers, as they invest both themselves and their cultures in their mediated interactions.

Similarly, Ito (1997) wrote of MUD (Multiple User Domain) users, suggesting that while the games and character construction involved may be artificial, the social constructions that result are more realistic than these games. Ito (1997) noted that "MUDder subjectivity, then, is both enabled and policed by sociotechnical structures of extension and control that are distrusted through global computer networks. They are *neither disconnected from nor reducible to subjectivity localized by the biological body in a fixed locale*, but are concretely rembodied through computational prostheses" (p. 99) [emphasis mine].

Psychoanalytic social theory also has linkages with Internet culture, according to several scholars. Wilbur (2000) relied on the Lacanian theory of the mirror, by which subjects imagine they exist behind the mirror, to create an understanding of the computer screen as a mirror. Thus, computer users come to believe that their own subjectivity exists behind the computer screen. This subjectivity encompasses an idealized vision of the self. Wilbur (2000) did, of course, question the notion (as Lacan) that the subject can exist behind the mirror/screen. Taking his cue from Freud, Robins (1995) saw virtual reality as infantile or regressive in terms of storytelling as it foists a "pretend" world on its users. Similarly, Holland (1995) presented a Freudian reading of cyberspace, predicated on the Cartesian assertion of the mind's superiority over the body. She likened the cyborg to the id, and she argued that our desire to destroy the cyborg is homologous to the destroying of our own unconscious desires.

Of course, personal subjectivity in cyberspace involves a (usually) conscious construction of identity. This construction of identity mirrors in many ways the construction of angelic imagery. Just as a person can provide demographic details about herself that create her subjectivity in cyberspace, people can construct angelic subjectivities through various details such as appearance, purpose, etc. Identities are completely construct-able.

Virtual subjectivity does depend, though, on actual subjectivity in the real world. In both the real and the virtual worlds, angels have a crucial role in subjectivity and identity, as people perceive them as a "bridge" between the natural and supernatural worlds. Through the creation of spiritual intermediaries like angels, people believe they can experience the supernatural in a more tangible way. Thus, people construct angels as incarnate expressions of divine intervention that seem at once both human and divine. Issues of subjectivity receive further expression with the popular (though not traditionally Judeo-Christian) belief that angels evolve from humans, echoed in the perception that as humans die they pass on to become guardian angels.

Theories about the subject, particularly those that relate to the virtual subjectivity of the Internet, are relevant to the study of a cultural phenomenon like angels for two reasons. First, cultural knowledge of angels comes, at least in part, from discourse, whether religious or media-centered. Through our discursive experiences, social or collective subjectivity collides with our individual subjectivity, and we become agents of and objects of our own subjectivity. Second, collective and individual subjectivity and identity are closely interwoven with religion and spirituality.

Moving beyond issues of subjectivity, in a related expression of identity formation and negotiation, youth culture has embraced alternative forms of religion and spirituality, such as Satanism. A brief discussion of one example of religion and spirituality in popular and youth culture will help illustrate the overall cultural landscape in which spiritual belief and imagery occurs.

In her article "Teenage Satanism as Oppositional Youth Subculture," Kathleen Lowney (1995) asserted that Satanism provides youth with a subculture that allows them to challenge mainstream society and its dominant ideology. She likened her ethnography of teenage Satanists to studies by other cultural scholars, such as Dick Hebdige's (1979) *Subculture, the Meaning of Style*. As well, Lowney's (1995) research revealed that Satanism provided an outlet of acceptance for youth who felt disenfranchised from both adult and youth "mainstream" culture.

Identity and presentation of self were key issues for the Satanists Lowney (1995) studied. They carved out their collective and individual identities through their oppositional relationship to mainstream culture. Likewise, their presentation of self uses symbols and artifacts that contradict trends in mainstream culture. This non-normative subjectivity serves as the most crucial feature of group membership and counter-hegemonic expression. As I have previously mentioned, while I hesitate to call belief in angels "resistant," I believe it can function as such by allowing the opportunity for people to resist traditional religion through adherence to beliefs that resonate more with personal forms of spirituality.

As previously mentioned, the role of spirituality in carving out individual subjectivity is a central issue at stake in this study of angels and Internet websites.

Angels and Cyberspace: Similarities

Like psychoanalytic theories, postmodernism has also influenced theories of the subject, mainly through the observation that the subject, like most entities in the postmodern world, has become fragmented, not merely decentered. In addition, post-industrial culture, with its computer-mediated focus, has also influenced the nature of the subject. Through the postmodern, postindustrial prevalence of the computer, our subjectivity has become at once global and collective, yet isolated and artificial. The substantial presence of angel admirers on the Internet speaks for the relevance of this new subjectivity to this study of angels, as the next few paragraphs outline.

First of all, Internet subjectivity arises from a purely discursive formation, as the Internet domain itself and all the subjects that inhabit it are constructed entirely of language, through words and visual symbols. In the same vein, belief in angels is an essentially discursive formation, as angels become (re)constructed in contemporary society through media portrayals and people's discussions of the alleged encounters with angels. Stories of angelic encounters, not the alleged encounters themselves, augment this discourse.

Second, in the dramaturgical tradition of Erving Goffman, subjectivity on the Internet resembles a performance, as people create their own subjectivity through choice of words, interactions, and even gender. In fact, Internet users can construct themselves using whatever variables they choose. Thus, given adequate motivation and research, a twenty-one year old male college student from Alberta can construct an identity for himself on the Internet as a fifty year old female Manhattan socialite. To use the example of the focus of this dissertation, these constructed subjectivities can include falsified accounts of purported angelic encounters. Yet, in the social constructionist tradition, these constructions may become as real as other identities through intersubjective encounters.

Another element of Internet subjectivity with a special relationship with angels involves the notion of "embodiment." Subjects do not exist in an "embodied" form on the Internet, as the correlation between an Internet subject and a "real world" counterpart may be incidental or non-existent. By the same token, belief in angels rests on the notion that "angel" subjects have a "virtual" or "unembodied" form, which may merge with a "real" or "embodied" form. For example, people who believe in angels may think of their "guardian angels" as spirits, until the time the "guardian angels" must take on corporeal forms to protect their charges. Thus, a believer may believe a guardian angel materializes out of ether into the form of a kindly human stranger who warns of evil or assists the believer out of harm's way. On the Internet, users may wish to disregard the "meat" or "wetware" as somehow inferior to the intellect, personality, and other "software."

Just as Internet subjectivity exists apart from a "body," it also exists outside of the constraints of time and space. A person can create a subject through discourse, and that discursive subject will remain constantly on the Internet, regardless of whether the person is "on" the Internet, making time irrelevant. And, when the person is "on" the Internet, the concept of place becomes fractured, as transportation from one site to another happens instantaneously, even coterminously. This freedom from time and space mimics the belief, also portrayed in the media, that angels can move seamlessly across time and space.

Fisher (1997) connected the postmodern and medieval desires to transcend the body in his discussion of cyberspace. He argued that this desire is essentially religious and, therefore, "similarly subject to deconstruction" (p. 113). Fisher (1997) wrote that "it is only when we have been disembodied that we may truly experience beatitude" (p. 116). He went on to liken the online self to Baudrillard's simulacrum. Aptly, Fisher (1997) wrote of online interactions as "a kind of celestial communion with angels" (p. 123).

Angels on the Internet

Introduction: Examining the Internet

Although I use semiotics as the method for this research on angel-themed websites, research on the Internet presents new methodological challenges in comparison with the more established fields such as television, film, and material culture. Particularly problematic for this study, I analyzed websites and producers, though I also wanted to garner some understanding of the consumers of the sites, particularly in situations with little power distance between producer and consumer. Before I discuss the particulars of this element of this research project, this section introduces some of these methodological challenges in brief.

In order to move beyond mere content analysis of websites, Sudweeks and Simoff (1999) suggested that qualitative Internet research should occur through such enterprises as categorizing dimensions or regularity in the data, including issues discussed, relationships among participants, and emotional tone. Kendall (1999) suggested that participant observation provides an especially effective way to research the Internet. This method allows for an understanding of issues such as the relationship between on- and off-line life. It also enables the researcher to really understand the context of cyber-interactions and the norms. Kendall (1999) insisted that cyberspace is largely white and male, and people's knowledge of these demographics impose practical limitations on potential identities (p. 67). Though participant observation does offer an excellent opportunity to understand website users/consumers, it poses a challenge in terms of the high level of time commitment required. Perhaps more importantly, this form of research creates, for me at least, the ethical challenge of dealing with asynchronous, aspatial virtual research participants who make bulletin board postings and contribute to chatrooms with little or no intention of having their words and ideas scrutinized by researchers. I felt I would do a disservice to these participants by using their words without gaining their permission, a near impossibility in many cases, and outside their likely intended use for their words. As a result, I decided against the use of detailed participant observation, relying instead on participants' contributions to existing websites whose producers make editorial choices about material.

The use of the semiotic model in the context of Internet research proves problematic, as Internet texts can differ markedly from the more typical semiotic texts of books, films, and visual communication. As Denzin (1999) noted, cybertalk differs from traditional conversation because cybertalk is non-linear, and "through personal embellishment, and by looping backward and forward in time, speakers create the context for extended utterances such as stories" (p. 11). While Denzin (1999) noted that the form (e.g. turntaking) of cybertalk is as important as the content, I focused essentially on content as the social relations among conversants are outside the scope of this research project. Interestingly, however, Denzin (1999), in his observations of self-help cybertalk, found women used cybertalk in a supportive and encouraging manner, whereas men used it more competitively.

Despite these challenges, a semiotic model of investigation seems to be the most appropriate for researching the Internet. Mitra and Cohen (1999) suggested that critical textual analysis of cybertalk might involve semiotic/structural analysis, examination of intertextuality, and an awareness of the process by which readers become writers of the text. The cyber-location further adds to the polysemy of the text, and while the text remains the center of focus, the nonlinear nature of cyberspace de-centers the content.

In light of these issues related to researching on the Internet, I applied semiotic analysis to a representative sample of the virtually limitless number of angel-themed websites on the Internet. In my general examination of angel websites, I delineated four major categories of "angel sites," as well as the additional the distinction of commercial sites that sell products as compared to sites that sell services, and I examined a sample site from each of the categories.[33] These categories emerged during my initial topical survey of hundreds of websites in the Fall of 1998.

First, a number of angel websites provide information about angels from a *religious* point of view. For example, "Catholic Online" discussed Catholic beliefs about angels, primarily through Biblical interpretation. Second, angel websites may focus on various *social causes*. The "About Angels" website discusses angels in the context of people suffering from HIV/AIDS, while the "Lost Angels" site is dedicated to murdered or missing children. A group working for world peace sponsors the "Angels4Peace" site. Sites such as these construct angels as people, either living or dead.

A third type of website has an essentially *commercial* theme, as these sites offer various types of commodified angel culture. "The Angel Store" sells angel-themed merchandise on-line, and it serves as an off-shoot of a storefront retail establishment. Similarly, the "Apple City Mall" (an on-line mall with a Christian theme) includes a retail site for purchasing angel products. A fourth type of website has a *personal* flavor, as individuals set up these sites to share their beliefs in angels without any overt purpose to spread their religion, social cause, or products. Linda Stover's "Do you believe in angels?" presents information about angels from her Christian background. One site, "Heartland Valley," was set up by a 28 year old woman who calls herself "angel," to show how important angels have become in her life since the death of her son.

In the following sections, I present brief analyses of each of the representative websites in turn. Then, I draw comparisons among the websites in the concluding section of this chapter.

Religious Website: "Catholic Online"

I would like to start my discussion of these websites with the most traditional and perhaps most official of those I examined. The "Catholic Online" website, the official website of the Catholic Church, has a section on saints and angels. The angel stream provides Biblical interpretations of common issues surrounding the nature of angels. I chose this site as an example of a site sponsored by a religious organization with an interest in providing scripturally specific views on angels. Although the sites don't identify its specific creator(s), I assume that the people providing the information have positions of authority in the Catholic Church, due to the official nature of the website.

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[33] For obvious reasons, this examination excludes sites with "Angel" in the title that do not relate to belief in angels (e.g. California Angels baseball team). It also excludes sites dedicated to pornographic or violent

While its readership may focus primarily on members of the Catholic Church, its official status makes it a reputable source for any Internet user with an interest in a scriptural topic such as angels. The institutional nature of the site also creates perhaps the highest degree of separation between producer and consumer.

Although the site does focus on the good/evil duality, I believe the central opposition in the text involves faith/disbelief. The site presents its information on God and angels as an objective truth that, of course, requires faith (particularly Catholic) to read the information unquestioningly. Thus, the "unadulterated" modality claim of the text is that God and His angels are unquestionably real. This would resonate most strongly, I believe, with the Catholic audience whom the creators may have seen as the primary audience for their site.

Most of the site focuses on text, with a few pictorial representations of angels. These angels include an image from Raphael's Sistine Madonna, the childlike cupid angels with curly hair and wings. Another picture shows a stained glass angel, clearly feminine, carrying a child. The Catholic Church has seemingly sanctioned these as official images, as they come from Renaissance art sources such as the Sistine Chapel. Not surprisingly, these images of women and children with wings are consistent with art through the ages. These artistic renderings, however, are inconsistent with the images painted in scriptures. The site reminds that scriptural angels are bodiless, and the literature review showed scriptural references to angels are genderless. Thus, the chubby children and ethereally beautiful women must be angels who have taken on human form. These images, taken from Renaissance-era painting, bespeak an era in Western history where science and rational thought began to dilute the power religion had in people's lives. Thus, the choice of these images, aesthetically pleasing or not, reflects this potentially problematic link between the spiritual and secular worlds. Assuming these images represent a conscious choice on behalf of the Catholic Church, the choice of "modern" representations, rather than "traditional" ones, exhibits the church's realization of its positioning in contemporary society. These representations may also indicate an awareness of website consumers and the images of angels these consumers may embrace,

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themes (e.g "dark angel"). These two types of sites, while common, lay outside the scope of this research.

both scriptural and secular.

The existence of angels, the site claims, "is assumed at the earliest times," and the site goes on to say that, "God bestowed upon angels great wisdom, freedom, and power." The site mentions the frequent presence of angels in the New and Old Testaments, and it also refers to the book of Tobit, emphasizing the Catholic sanctioning of these texts. Robbins (1995) supported this, saying that though the Catholic Bible includes additional material as compared to the Jewish and Protestant Bibles, the Catholic doctrine doesn't seem to rest on the apocryphal scriptures.

Overall, the site depicts angels as messengers, "the agents of God's particular providence for mankind." The site also mentions guardian angels, who each person has to help him or her embrace good and avoid evil. As well, the site provides a number of sample prayers for guardian angels, which mention the special role of angels as guardians of children (mentioned specifically in the New Testament) and the role angels have in helping people until they die. As one prayer asks, "Deliver my soul so that with thee it may praise, love and contemplate the goodness of God forever and ever."

The site also makes mention of fallen angels, also called bad spirits or demons, who have permanently turned away from God. The church clearly constructs angels receiving God's love automatically, though some angels exercise their free will to turn away. As well, the site discusses the nine choirs of angels, though the Bible does not mention these specifically in this configuration. The site provides short descriptions of four of these nine choirs, all of which the Bible mentions, though without much detail. First, the seraphim are God's guardians, with six wings. Second, the cherubim, double-winged and manlike in appearance, serve as guardians of God's glory. The seventh choir, the principalities, is made up of spiritual beings that are hostile to God and humans, though Christ rules over them. The eighth choir, the archangels, is particularly important as it serves as messengers during important times. The archangels St. Michael (also Prince of the Seraphim) and Gabriel appeared in Biblical scriptures, while Raphael appeared in the book of Tobit. Scriptural citations serve as clearly codified reminders of "the word" in this official site.

Although consumers can access the text of the website in part or in whole in any order, the creators have established a preferred order. The site seems to start with the most basic information and proceeds on to discuss more active engagements with angels by suggesting prayers or further reading. The dominant reading would likely involve the reader accepting these Catholic points of view as facts, whereas an oppositional reading would occur if a reader contested the information, such as a disbelief in the fallen angels discussed in the site. A negotiated reading might occur if a reader elected to adopt certain ideas on the site and intermingle these with other ideas not expressed on the site. For example, a reader might believe that the archangels Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael exist, through she may also choose to believe that the angels she believes she has encountered are her dead relatives.

Another part of the website features a number of stories of angel encounters, offered as proof of their existence. These stories feature narratives both consistent with and somewhat contradictory to scriptures. For example, some stories depict angel encounters with people nearing death, either permanently or as a "near death experience." These angels are typically female, with white robes, wings, and bright light surrounding them. In another common theme, a stranger helps people, especially children, avoid injury or other distress, or the strangers pray with people in need. The sudden, mysterious disappearance of the strangers leads the people to believe the strangers were actually angels. This construction clearly relates to the notion of angels masquerading as strangers in Hebrews 13. These angels appear quite human, naturally. The site also mentions angel encounters where dead loved ones returned in spirit to bring a message or provide guidance. These encounters seem out of place on a Catholic website, as the Bible clearly states that angels are non-human. Perhaps these encounters provide ideas that non-Catholics can relate to and allow for negotiated readings of the site. The Church, by endorsing these people as angels, seems to give credence to non-scriptural angel experiences, so long as their presence encourages belief in angels.

In essence, most of the information about angels on the Catholic Online website remains consistent with traditional scriptural mention of angels in the Bible, and to a lesser extent additional Biblical texts. In a number of places, however, the site presents information about angels either inconsistent with or contrary to these scriptural references. As odd as this may seem, perhaps this represents an acceptance on the part of the church for consumers of the site, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, to cobble together their own personal set of beliefs about angels within an acceptable, negotiated range. The angel subjectivities thusly created incorporate both institutional and more secular elements. Thus, the signifiers of angels (e.g. Renaissance-era art, non-scriptural guardian angel stories) seem to locate the signifier in a generic way, as an angel in a spiritual context, rather than a context of purely organized religion.

Personal Website: "Do You Believe in Angels?"

The next website, like Catholic Online, presents fairly traditional scripturally based information about angels, though from a personal view rather than an institutional one. Linda Stover constructed "Do You Believe in Angels?" as an extensive personal website, though it is also a part of Stover's overall "Apple City" website, connected to areas such as her business, Stover Mountain Music, and Internet Marketing strategies. The "Angels" section, however, remains clearly separate from these commercial enterprises. The site includes information about angels from Stover's Biblical perspective, artworks on angels, and 2000 "angel encounter" stories. Stover provides links to other sites, such as Christian artists, but these links do not directly relate to angels, so I left them out of this analysis. Stover aims her site at anyone who believes in angels or people open to the possibility of their existence, with special focus on consumers with Christian beliefs. While Stover takes a clearly Biblical approach, she presents enough diverse angel stories on the site to take into account non-Biblical beliefs as well. She also allows some "audience interaction" on the site, including encouraging people to submit questions, comments, stories, and poems. Stover's site represents a fairly short power distance between producer and consumer, and she likely identifies rather closely with her primary audience. The site is mainly text, although there is one section on art and graphics of books.

A very clear duality emerges in the analysis of Stover's webpage: Christian/Non-Christian. Stover's Christian beliefs impact virtually every element of the site, and she constructs her belief in angels around this faith. She also emphasizes that her Christian belief in angels represents the only true belief people should have about angels. Thus, her unselfconscious modality claim is that angels are real in the Christian, scriptural sense. Stover's emphasis on the Christian belief in angels seems stronger than that on the Catholic site.

References to Christianity, overt or symbolic, appear with great frequency on the website. Stover clearly states that God created angels for humans who believe in Jesus, though angels may minister to non-believers as well. She labels the weblinks she provides as "Christian Sites" and "Christian Artists." Furthermore, all of the books about angels that she recommends are Christian, many published by the Christian publishing house Zondervan (though not all visitors of her site would recognize the name and orientation of this publisher). She also recommends the *Touched by an Angel* books, by born-again Christian Martha Williamson. The experts on angels she cites are also Christian, such as Billy Graham and John Calvin. Many of the people who write in with their own angel stories clearly label themselves as Christian, showing that Stover fosters an identification with the Christian element of her audience. And, some of the art images of angels she features include angels in Christian holiday contexts, such as Easter and Christmas. She says people must admit sin to be Christians and thus come to know angels. Without embracing Christianity, she seems to tacitly assert, a person cannot have a meaningful ongoing relationship with angels.

One key way Stover supports this theme of Christianity in her website is her use of Biblical references to angels, both in the Old and New Testaments. She uses Biblical references to flesh out the nature of angels. For example, she says angels are essentially genderless, though depicted as more male in the Bible. She writes that angels are not people who have died; they are other entities entirely. She also refers only briefly to the angel hierarchy, which receives a great deal of attention in other sources but only a vague mention in the Bible. She also mentions only two angels "actually" have names, Michael and Gabriel mentioned in the Bible. She omits reference to Uriel and Metatron, two angels mentioned in additional Biblical texts used by some religions (e.g. Catholic) but obviously outside of her definition of scriptures. Stover provides Biblical links to offer further explanation for the ideas she mentions on the website. Again, her Biblical references give more detail than those on the Catholic Online website do.

As part of these Biblical references, Stover makes frequent mention of evil angels or demons. She writes that some angels are fallen and therefore not capable of redemption. She also states that humans should not attempt communication with angels, as these attempts may result in communication with demons. In particular, Stover warns against the use of Ouija boards, clairvoyants, and psychics, and she suggests belief in sorcerers and spiritists may result in demonic contact. Essentially, Stover purports that any non-Christian, non-Biblical belief in angels may actually represent belief in demons. Some of the angel encounter stories presented in the website echo Stover's beliefs, as people write about sensing an evil presence or some other demonic apparition.

Despite this clear Christian orientation, this site refers frequently to the less denominational "God," though the site constructs God in a manner consistent with Stover's Christian beliefs. Stover writes that God created the angels and that angels worship God. She also emphasizes that people should not worship angels, but they should instead save their prayer for God. She goes on to say that angels are not specific to any one religion, though her insistence on the Christian belief in angels as the "true" belief belies this assertion. In fact, she questions the Catholic belief in praying to God through Saints and angels, so her version of Christianity is clearly Protestant, likely fundamentalist. Even the fallen angels she relates to God, as Stover writes that Satan was jealous of God and he and his angels fell because of their jealousy. Stover suggests that people should remain wary of any angel story that focuses glory on people, rather than God. In fact, she insists that submissions to her site "must be true" and "must glorify God," again fostering a special identification with website visitors who share her orientation to religion and angels.

Furthermore, Stover emphatically states that belief in angels should not depend on "actual" angel encounters. She asserts that faith in the existence of angels should instead have a religious (for her, Christian) motivation. One of the poems on her site echoes this, as it discusses "not knowing" about angels (presumably in some experiential way) does not waver belief in them. Stover likens the lack of visual proof of angels to the scientific phenomenon of electricity. Even though people cannot see electricity, they believe in its existence, just as they should believe in angels. This "faith in science" argument attempts to ground angel belief in the rational, as well as spiritual, world.

Despite this focus on the intangible nature of angels, Stover does make frequent mention of the appearance of angels. She points out that angels are not human, according to the Bible and do not have a specific corporeal form. Instead, they take on human form, of any sort, when they need to do their ministering. While Stover admits she favors Victorian representations of angels, further supported by the images on her site, she notes these attractive winged female angels and chubby cupids have nothing to do with the "actual" appearance of angels. Instead, she uses scriptural references to mention what is known about angels, such as their wings. She also states that angels appear in dreams or visions, as well as in person, and that they are capable of instantaneous travel. Stover also includes on the site an article by Gary Schooley, who expresses concern about he popularity of angels in the media and material culture. He believes these non-Biblical representations are false, and thus harmful.

Stover's presentation of stories of angel encounters shows a strong link between the producer and consumers of this website. I would assume that Stover makes editorial decisions about which submissions to include, and these decisions likely reflect her religious beliefs. The encounter stories on the website thus likely demonstrate a high level of identification between Stover and the website users who consume/producer her website. In the encounter stories, the appearance of angels takes on essentially three common forms. First, angels appear frequently as fully human, and these angels usually have a physical role such as saving a child from injury. When the stranger disappears or is never seen again, the person who had the encounter believes he or she has seen an angel. These human stranger angels can be any sex, age, race, etc. The second type of angel appearance would be a vision of a non-human, but human-like entity. Typically, these entities are female, with flowing robes and perhaps wings. They may float or fly, and they may bring a message, warn of impending difficulty, or give a feeling of peace. Finally, the third type of angel appearance merely involves a vague physical sensation. This may be come the form of a bright light or a disembodied voice, or a blurred image on a photograph. These sensations usually occur for no apparent reason, or they result in a vague feeling of peace for the recipient. Clearly, the more active the angel, the more human it appears. Also, the ethereal visions tend to resemble artistic representations of angels, rather than Biblical descriptions, as often female in flowing robes.

Beyond the mere appearance of angels, Stover emphasizes the protective nature of angels, as guardians of all people, especially children. She gives scriptural support to their functions as helpers, protectors, rescuers, and messengers. She includes the full text of Psalm 91, which mentions angels guarding over people. In particular, Stover suggests that those who pray to God are protected by angels, which she illustrates with personal examples. The poetry she includes also mentions angels as guardians, particularly as children, animals, and people in the perhaps vulnerable state of sleep. Many of the angel encounter stories focus on this protective quality, too. They range from an unseen force pulling a child out of danger to a mysterious stranger giving protective advice or words of inspiration. Again, many of these stories involve children and their special role with guardian angels.

In addition to this protective quality, Stover focuses on the ways angels help people in need. Stover recalls a time in her childhood when her family had little to eat, and a woman appeared at their door with a large sack of potatoes. They never saw the woman again, and the family came to believe she was an angel. Stover seems to argue that her family's status as the minister's family made the appearance of an angel to them their "due," as Stover believes angels appear to help those who pray and have Christian faith. And, many of the other angel encounters written about on the website mention how angels give people a helping hand. Typically, these stories involve faith and people using their free will to help themselves after the angel offers comfort or assistance.

While these magnanimous roles of angels have the most scriptural support, according to Stover, angels also have relevance in the more mundane aspects of life. She wrote an essay about angels appearing in unseen coincidences and the "small things" in life. One of her poems also echoes this idea. As well, perhaps the most mundane way angels appear is as very ordinary humans, seeming strangers who offer protection, guidance, and comfort and then disappear. Further, several of the angel encounter stories focus on the appearance of an angel for no apparent reason. One person writes of an encounter with an angel while on the toilet. The angel provided no assistance nor gave a message; the mere appearance of the angel in such mundane circumstances was the focus of the encounter.

Though Stover remains adamant that angels are loving protectors of humans, she also allows their more negative functions. She gives scriptural reference to their role in Judgment. A poem refers to the feeling of sadness that angels can bring. And, some of the encounters tell stories of people meeting up with the "angel of death," though the appearance of angels may not precurse an actual death. In another connection between angels and death, some of the stories of angel encounters purport that dead loved ones appeared as angels. Though Stover clearly dismisses this possibility as Biblically inconsistent the presence of these stories on her website allow for the comfort of a dead loved one in some angelic or spiritual way.

As I previously mentioned, Stover's site establishes belief in angels in a specifically Christian (Protestant, fundamentalist) context, and she fosters special identification with consumers of the same belief system. Although she allows some stories on the site that subtly contradict some scriptural references, she frequently and adamantly creates a picture of angels as messengers and helpers of those who believe in Christianity. Her personal site presents this construction even more adamantly and consistently than the Catholic Online site. Thus, she presents a broad spectrum of signifiers (angels disguised as people of all walks of life, or merely as vague, intangible presences) that virtually all connect to the specific, rather narrow signified of "Christian angel," with little room for personal connections outside this designated signified. The consumers/producers thus participate in the construction of angel subjectivities in a very specific way.

Social Cause Website Case Study: "About Angels"

In a departure from the previous two traditional, scripturally-based websites, the next website presents a considerably more contemporary and flexible interpretation of angels. The "About Angels" website includes images and information about angels and also provides support for people affected by AIDS and HIV. The creator, Dan Martell, has little overt biographical information on the site, though he does include a seemingly autobiographical tale in a section of the website with a series of stories. He tells of an abusive childhood and his path to self-acceptance and compassion. The site provides no clear details about his age, occupation, sexual orientation, etc. He lives in Ontario, and says he "experiences angels and love" and is "a student of caring, healing, dis-ease, and the divine." He purports to approach angels from an amateur standpoint, and he says he has limited knowledge of the Bible. His readership would be twofold: those interested in angels, and those affected by HIV/AIDS. He would likely identify most closely with openminded and/or disenfranchised people, and I perceive the power distance he creates between himself and consumers as quite narrow. His website title "About Angels" is perhaps a bit deceptive and one-sided.

The central opposition Martell presents in the text is love/life and death. The site's focus on AIDS makes the life/death duality particularly salient, and Martell's focus on love of self, others God, and life makes this a necessary part of the opposition. Martell approaches the topic of angels with the assumption they are real, based on his own experiences, though his own experiences are not discussed on the site.

The website begins with specific references to angels, such as photographs of angel statues, quotes about angels, and suggestions for contacting angels. Then, a section called "About angels and aids" provides readings about physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual tools for dealing with AIDS. This section presents only a few, tenuous, references to angels, such as mentioning angels in the context of coming to terms with dying. The next section of the site provides a series of essays and stories for children and adults, focusing on healing and embracing life. Finally, the last sections provide an opportunity for website readers to become more actively involved with the site. Martell offers angel photos and books for a nominal cost, with proceeds going to AIDS/HIV charities. Also, the site lists resources for dealing with AIDS/HIV. Finally, a link to email Dan to ask about angels is available.

Although the site approaches the subject of angels more from a broad spiritual, rather than traditionally religious, perspective, Martell frequently makes mention of religion, often negatively. In "The Story of Dan," Martell's apparent autobiography, Martell talks of the "shameful, hateful, unhappy Roman Catholic nuns" who "instilled in him feelings of confusion, shame, and self-loathing." He also talks of the heterosexism of organized religion, particularly the "Religious /right." The church's persecution of non-dominant groups emphasizes this lack of acceptance of diversity. Despite this seeming anger towards the church, some of the images of angels Martell includes in the website are clearly Biblical. While many of his photographs depict female angels, one statue he included is clearly the archangel Michael, dressed for battle in a knee-length tunic, sword, and wings. Martell encourages people to seek out positive forms of organized religion and personal spirituality. He advocates prayer, especially due to its purported healing power.

The "healing" code is quite prominent throughout the website. Martell discusses emotional wounds, such as his own abusive childhood, as well as physical disease (AIDS/HIV). His focus, though, is on healing these problems and learning to grow emotionally. The site discusses a number of alternative and natural therapies for dealing with AIDS/HIV, and Martell reinforces the mind/body connection issue. Martell emphasizes personal agency in this healing, mentioning angels as guides that people can use in their own healing journeys. Martell even uses lowercase letters for "hiv" and "aids," "to reduce the harm their fear creates." As well, he aims his stories for children and adults at healing "the child within" of emotional and spiritual wounds.

One of the most important elements of this healing, and an area Martell believes the angels can help people with, is acceptance of the self and of others. He suggests that people may experience self-loathing and personal guilt, and they need to learn to accept their own faults and forgive themselves. Martell says the angels play a role in this process as they protect people from their own negativity. Furthermore, Martell's emphasis on the genderless and agelessness of angels reinforces his desire for the acceptance of diversity. Martell mentions hatred and racism, including hate mail he has received and the beating death of gay student Matthew Shepard, and the lack of compassion for the homeless. He believes that people need to become more forgiving and compassionate towards people, regardless of their diversity.

Martell also emphasizes the idea of the acceptance of death. He calls it a "transition" and suggests people should welcome "the arrival of angels" in their lives. He encourages people to plan for their own deaths, especially those dying from HIV/AIDS. Through Martell does give his readers ample opportunity to focus on death, he also encourages people to embrace love and life. He encourages people to seek out others and share their love. He also talks of the angels' infinite capacity for love. As well, he encourages people to "be in the moment" and reminds that people should model the angels in their embrace of the minutia of life, such as "precious beads and flowers tangled in our hair and really cool hats and old-fashioned ceiling fans."

Although Martell presents a largely flexible image of angels on his site, he does so with particular limitations that reflect his viewpoint. As well, he presents comparatively few signifers of angels, presenting little specific detail about their appearance. Instead, Martell focuses on the role of angels in healing people's physical and emotional selves. In doing so, he hopes to divorce the signifiers of angels from the signified of traditional, organized religion. Rather, he seeks to connect all the signifiers of angels with purely positive and personal signifieds of angels. In doing so, he creates an identity for himself and consumers that focuses on these positive, nonjudgmental elements of angels.

Commercial Service Website: "'Re' Connect with Your Angels"

The "'Re'Connect with Your Angels" website focuses on Rev. Cassandra D. Anaya, PhD, and her services as a channeler of angels, psychic, and clairvoyant. Rev. Anaya or her consultant seems to have created the website, written mainly in the first person from Anaya's perspective. Although the site does provide some information about angels, channeling, etc., it focuses on the selling of Rev. Anaya's services. The audience would include anyone willing and/or able to pay her fees of $25-120. Anaya creates a fairly rigid power distinction between herself and her audience, with the fee she charges as well as her higher level of expertise. I selected this site as another example of a commercial site, as well as representative of an intangible angel experience similar to the angel readings discussed in Chapter 5. As well, Anaya's subjectivity is clearly stamped onto the site.

The central opposition in the text involves rationality vs. faith, generally categorized as "New Age," and Anaya plays on both parts of this duality. The dominant reading would involve the audience having faith in the existence of angels and Anaya's psychic abilities, coupled with an appreciation for the logical claims Anaya makes for the experience she provides. A negotiated reading might involve the embrace of just one of these, such as a devout Christian only focusing on the issues of faith while ignoring the logical claims. Oppositional readings are, of course, possible, with the most oppositional perhaps involving the reader who rebuffs both the logical and spiritual arguments and brands Anaya a charlatan. Although I believe Anaya does create some commonalities between herself and her audience, the power distance she creates reduces the degree of identification between herself and her audience.

Anaya's construction of her own persona is the most central symbol in the website. She presents information and symbols that support both her rational, intellectual site and her spiritual, emotional side. She carefully uses her title (Rev.) and academic designation (PhD) simultaneously throughout the website. Her Reverend status comes from her ordination with the "Teaching of the Inner Christ" church, and her PhD is in Psychology. The photograph shows a woman both attractive (stylish hair, well made up) and pensive (with her hand under her chin). She also gives information about her challenges in live, such as being widowed while pregnant, followed by a difficult second marriage. She talks of her natural gift of psychic ability, honed through study. Also, she downplays the commercial motivation for her career by noting a friend insisted she begin giving readings professionally. She also demonstrates her well-adjusted personal life with tidbits about her daughter and information about her friend Chuck Muncie, San Diego Charger and founder of a children's organization. As well, she provides angel art by a friend, Jon-William Brown, and encourages visitors to also look at his site.

To further emphasize the rational, Anaya gives detailed definitions of channeling and clairvoyance. Anaya also provides a great deal of rather academic information on angels, though this information seems to come from the "New Age" perspective. She provides detailed "biographies" of her own angels, all male. Yannie is "From the 12 stars known as Pleiades" in the Taurus constellation. The Greek historical information hearkens back to the classical, intellectual age of Ancient Greece. She also provides lists of the angels who coordinate with the months, planets, days, and zodiac. As well, Anaya promises "rational" proof of angels for her customers. She tells people that she will give them the name of their angel, the signal that will demonstrate the presence of the angel, and the knowledge of how to communicate with the angels as proof of their existence.

For the spiritual side of her service, Anaya focuses on how reconnecting with angels works as a way to heal oneself. She "reminds" readers that they were connected with angels as children, yet they learned to disconnect as they aged. She also provides the emotional argument that once people have reconnected with their angels that they are "never alone." And, she calls herself a psychic healer. The website also provides both logical and emotional evidence for Anaya's ability through the sample of testimonials. On the logical side, people such as "Executive Directors" laud Anaya's ability to communicate, her respect for privacy, her ability to provide accurate forecasts, and her evidence of connection with a loved one and with angels. Then, on the spiritual/emotional side, people such as a musician mention Anaya's gift of insight, her ability to boost self-esteem and optimism, and her confirmation of the person's own ideas.

Most of the religious tradition that Anaya incorporates into her website is vaguely Christian, perhaps more accurately described as "New Age." She mentions God and His love and acceptance. As well, her angels Metatron and Uriel are both mentioned in additional Biblical texts. The site also emphasizes that everyone has guardian angels to help with any issue. Her section on her own spiritual beliefs confirms this, as she discusses her Catholic background and current religious orientation. She mentions that her family included priests and nuns and that she continues to carry pictures of Mary and Jesus in her wallet. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church, she came to believe, focused too much on man and sin, not God and goodness. This belief led her on a path of religious exploration that ended in her joining "The Teaching of the Inner Christ Church" and becoming an ordained minister. These religious textual references illustrate a generally Christian viewpoint, though the total focus on the positive elements of God and angels is more "New Age" than strictly Biblical. Her references to non-Biblical angels support this as well. Furthermore, Anaya's use of channeling as a way to connect with angels and dead people emphasizes this New Age persuasion.

Perhaps the most consistent code throughout the site is the commercial nature of the enterprise. On every stream, the site mentions the price of the services, payment options, the 800 number, policies such as "no refunds," and the multiple ways Anaya can execute a reading (in person, by phone, by email, in a chat room). All of these work together to continually remind the audience that Anaya wants to sell her services, not merely provide a site with information about angels. The site does attempt to downplay this commercial focus, though, in the frequent mention that a portion of the fee goes to charities for child abuse, domestic violence, and AIDS. Anaya also prods the purchase of her service with a series of "FAQs" to help website visitors gain knowledge about the nature and cost of her services.

Anaya's site conveys two central issues about her perspective on angels with her "New Age" constructions and focus on angel readings as a commercial service. The new age signifiers include the naming of personal angels and the channeling of angel information, and the commercial signifiers include typical commodity elements such as prices and payment methods. Working together, these two elements create the signified I loosely call the "contemporary angel." This construction involves the consumption of a cultural product with some traditional religious elements as well as significant "New Age" millennium-era interpretations. This angel as a symbol of personal spirituality comes in the form of a product that can serve as both an end and a mean for the consuming subject.

Commercial Product Website: "The Angel Store"

Like the angel-reader service website, the final representative website I examined centers on the commercial element of the angel phenomenon. "The Angel Store" website sells a variety of angel-themed collectibles and giftware, in conjunction with "The Angel Store" retail site in Fairfield, Connecticut. Owners Patti and Jack Jason opened the Connecticut store in October 1994, and the website was apparently create in 1996. Through the site does not clearly name the actual creator/webmaster, the material on the site is copyrighted to "The Angel Store," so I believe the Jasons have the ultimate editorial responsibility. The site would allow anyone with access to the Internet to purchase products from the store, and the site encourages purchase for personal use or for gifts. The lack of personal information about the creators, coupled with the commercial nature of the site, creates little identification between website producer and consumer beyond the commercial interest in angel collectibles. As well, my interview with another storeowner suggests that the website may also provide a form of advertising to encourage locals and visitors to go to the Connecticut store to see the full line of merchandise. The website does specifically encourage visits to the store, and it offers telephone and email contact with the store to inquiries about merchandise not available at the website. I selected this site as an example of a commercial website; it was the first to appear when I performed a website search. Though I did find some Canadian websites, these generally duplicated the in-person observation I did for some of the material culture research for the earlier chapter, and I did not want to use the same information for both elements of this study.

Of course, a visitor can access the website in any order, though the sidebar presents a prescribed order. The website begins with general information about the store and merchandise. Then, it presents specific merchandise, starting with the "Special Offer," then moving to "Objets d'Art," collectibles, Home Accessories, and Jewelry. The later sections allow for more interactions through the mailing list, links, and the order form. The links, however, are few in number and not specifically related to angels. Throughout the site, the order process, phone number, and email appear frequently to remind the reader of the true commercial nature of the site.

The central opposition in this text is not obvious to me. While the site has indicators of the spiritual/secular and faith/disbelief oppositions, these are neither consistent nor strong. The site does little to focus on issues of religion and spirituality, and it does not emphasize the need to believe in angels in order to consume the collectibles. There are no stores of angelic encounters, and no links to websites that give information on the nature of angels. Instead, I believe the opposition revolves more around indulgence/frugality. The site seems to encourage the purchase of collectibles with no clear use-value. Instead, people consume these collectibles because the collectibles' aesthetic value enables the consumers to enjoy indulging themselves, rather than forgoing the purchase in order to be frugal. The commercial nature of this site echoes this focus on consumption.

The site includes graphic art, photographs, and text to introduce, discuss, and display the merchandise. The first iconic sign the website viewer is likely to see is the store's logo, which features the name of the store with a halo over the "A" in angel and wings flanking the name. The tagline "Discover a little piece of heaven on earth" appears below the logo. This contemporary icon, with the disembodied angel parts and the somewhat irreverent motto signifies a text focused more on contemporary, rather than classical, angel interpretations. Nonetheless, the use of words such as "heavenly," "celestial," and "divine" are used to describe the merchandise.

The website shows generally contemporary merchandise. For example, the "special offer" product is Angel Water, a perfume/cologne essential oil described as an alternative therapy with waters from the Jordan River that will "bring you Angelic joy, confidence, good luck, and self esteem." The site emphasizes its commercial nature of site with the mention of a $3 saving and a bonus bottle of scented oil in passion "Spirit." The product comes in an orientalized pyramid box, with stylized angels sporting wings. Similarly, "The Worry Box" is kept at the bedside to place metaphorically worries "when you need peace and joy, the angels will be there." Both of these products emphasize the ability of angels to heal emotionally and spiritually without any particular religious underpinning.

The next section features soft sculptures and objects d'art. These objects d'art are the most traditional depictions of angels from the Biblical perspective. A plaster cast of Michael the archangel shows a Hellenic-looking "angel warrior" with a knee-length tunic and wings. His features appear similar to the Renaissance depictions of angels. Next, two child angels of white ceramic are billed as "angels who think of you," as one thinks of ways to serve his owner and the other prays for his owner. These children, though androgynous in appearance, are described as male, with Renaissance features, long robes, and wings. The "Embraced by Wings of Love" statue shows a bronze male angel holding a young woman in his arms. Again, the angel has wings, a robe, and Renaissance-style rendering. The embrace between the two, though spiritual on the surface, has romantic/sexual undertones. Another bronze sculpture shows a guardian angel, an androgynous male, kneeling in a cloud and looking downward. All of these objects are priced at $140-$200 US each, putting them in a higher price range than other products on the same area of the site. The stuffed teddy bear angel, with wings and a lace heart in its hands, costs just $40.

The "Collectible Angels and Angel Figurines" priced at $16 - $25 US, are more contemporary and whimsical than the objets d'art. The website shows a trio of stylized blown glass angels playing instruments. They are featureless and relatively shapeless, but they do have halos and wings. The site also shows also two depictions of humans who have died and become angels, Blanche the hairdresser and Oscar the retired soldier turned golfer. Blanche has dark hair and a vaguely ethnic dark complexion, while Oscar is Caucasian. Both have small wing and wear earthly streetclothes.

The Home Accessories are also reasonably priced at $12 - $85 US. The site offers pillows with stylized winged angels, and a wishing crystal on the pillow's surface. The site says "each comes with a week's worth of wishes," which are placed into the pillow's wishing pocket to "let the angels do their work." The store also sells a series of angel nightlights with stained glass renditions of a number of different angels, from Raphael's cherub angels to Victorian Cherubs. These young angels are especially meant for children, according to the text. Two other collectibles feature kissing child angels, through not particularly sexual or romantic. The porcelain candleholder features two angels, one female and one male, kissing. An umbrella has a young boy and girl angel kissing, "The First Kiss, " by William Adophe Bougerau, c. 1800.

The site also displays "one of a kind" American folk art angels, quite stylized and colorful, with sayings such as "Congratulations." Resin garden accessories feature cherubs as outdoor home adornment. The cherubs are full bodied with wings or merely a face with wings. Finally, Raphael's cherubs form the backdrop for a clock with their upward turned eyes they are "watching time fly by." These home accessories, in general, feature childlike angels or cherubs similar to the figurines and collectibles, while the objects d'art feature grown male angels. This male dominance legitimizes the objets d'art over the kitschier collectibles, and the higher prices for the objects emphasizes their status as true pieces of artwork. Similarly, the art style of the kitsch is generally Victorian or contemporary folk, while the objects are more Renaissance or Classical.

The Jewelry section of the website features jewelry and jewelry boxes, most with angels but some with more general spiritual value. First, the site features "Andy Lakey" jewelry, a 14 K gold and sterling silver link by this artist who has "been commanded by the angels to create 2000 angels by the year 2000." This jewelry features highly stylized, barely recognizable angels. Next, the "Dream Wish" bracelets include stones with various healing powers, supposedly worn by celebrities and featured in national magazines.

Another necklace set features small sterling silver cherubs, holding a heart of crystal in their arms. The text suggests this is a romantic gift. Bougerau's "First Kiss,' two cherubs kissing, is made into a pendant, another romantic types of gift. The "Bless Angel" pin, pendant, or earrings show stylized angels (female) with large wings. Guardian angel cherubs are made into bracelets, necklaces, and earrings. The jewelry boxes range from porcelain cherubs to a mahogany box with Raphael's cherubs or a modern, feminine angel with flowing wings, hair, and robes. The texts emphasize the protective feature of these jewelry boxes.

This collectibles commercial website provides the most casual interpretation of angels, as it does not make clear ontological or normative statements about angels. Rather, it presents a wide variety of angel signifiers (men, women, and animals) with no clear linkages to signifieds of religious or spiritual nature. Instead, the signified involves a form of consumption based on personal pleasure or indulgence, and the relationship between website producer and consumer centers around this consumption.

Conclusions

Taken collectively, the five websites discussed here represent the potential for the Internet as a truly millennium-era context for fans to define themselves through the construction and consumption of angelic imagery. As well, the Internet provides an opportunity for unique forms of community that enable like-minded people to join together through their participation on the "narrowcasted" possibilities the medium provides. In semiotic terms, the signifier/signified relationships depend completely on the individual website, and the relationship can vary from direct to loose to anywhere in between.

The five websites discussed in the earlier section of this chapter represent five of the virtually limitless possible "subject positions" the website users can take in relation to their belief in angels as fostered by the different website creators. Construction of individual subjectivity is a necessity on the Internet, as the medium is entirely discursive, and only through text can individuals share information about themselves with others. The websites create the possibility of mirrored "ideal" reflections of subjects when they create and consume the discourse about angels particular to the site(s) and site creators with which they choose to involve themselves. The less commercial sites create closer identification between producer and consumer than the commercial sites, and the more personal sites create more identification than the institutional site. Like the Lacanian-inspired notion that the computer screen provides a mirror behind which the ideal self exists, the websites allow people to interact with other like-minded people, including site creators, as they create subject-positions that resonate with their ideal selves. Though these personal relationships are not necessary for all users of the websites, they certainly become possible through postings and participation in chats. For example, a person who has a utopian vision of herself and her world as capable of infinite compassion and healing might be drawn to the "About Angels" website for information about angels as agents of healing, particularly for people with AIDS. While this subject-position may not define this person before her interaction with the website, her interaction with the website creates a (new) idealized identity for that person that becomes as real as her "real" identity.

Further, the plethora of subject-positions made possible by the Internet's ability to allow producers to "narrowcast" to particular groups of people allows for the location and construction of a personal, ideal image in virtually any form. In this study, I identified five potential subject positions created by the representative websites:

- **Catholic** – traditional, yet open to modern negotiation of spirituality
- **Christian** – specifically defined as "fundamentalist" Christian; Biblical
- **Cause-al** – devoted to social causes and social criticism
- **Contemporary** – spirituality as an intellectual New Age commodity
- **Casual** – consuming angels with no designated spiritual connection

Of particular interest in the context of the millennium era, the construction of an idealized form of personal spirituality becomes possible as people "choose" their subject-positions in relation to their actual or ideal views about angels. Further, the virtual community of the Internet creates a sort of institutionalization of this spirituality, as people come together to share a particular viewpoint when they choose to create and consume particular websites, particularly when creators and consumers closely identify with one another. The breadth of sites makes possible any number of individual forms of spirituality, as ~~well.~~

As well, the Internet allows for a private form of consumption, a "weekend-only world" that enables the angel admirer to escape from possible belittling opinions about angel belief into a world, real in its virtuality, where other people share the same views. In this way, the Internet provides a site for resistance to belief in angels, a view held by many people in an age of increased secularization. Further, by seeking out viewpoints similar to their own that may exist at odds with institutionalized religion, angel admirers can resist traditional, organized religion in favor of their own, constructed, idealized forms of spirituality. This site for resistance may prove especially important for women, as they tend to espouse higher levels of consumption of angel-themed cultural products. The Internet provides a special venue for women to gather, as scholars such as Haraway, Plant, and Lupton argued. Women's positioning outside male culture makes the resistant and alternative possibilities that the Internet offers particularly attractive.

In general, too, the Internet websites devoted to angels discussed in this study demonstrate the empowering nature of fan culture sites such as these websites provide. This empowerment can come through financial sources (such as the retail website and the angel readings website), and it can also come through social activism (such as the AIDS website). In particular, this empowerment extends to non-dominant groups such as women and demonstrates the potential importance of the Internet to these groups. The angel sites can also provide a forum in which people can embrace angels as religious constructs, either through traditional religion or the more modern (and typically secular) "civil religions" that Bellah describes.

Finally, the Internet provides an appropriate context for the creation and reproduction of angelic subjects, as it is, by definition, virtual or even spiritual. Since the Internet creates no time/space boundaries, it enables communication that occurs instantly all over the world. This instantaneous transmission of messages mirrors the purported ability of angels to travel instantaneously, unencumbered by embodiment. Further, the superiority of mind/spirit over body entrenched in the Internet echoes a major tenet of many forms of religion and spirituality. Just as the "virtual" communities and subjectivities made possible by the Internet can become real through socially constructed interactions, so, too, can angels "become real" through these same constructive patterns. In this way, perhaps the Internet is an ideal location for people's conversations about angels, subjectivity, and spirituality.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS

If the "sign of the times" of the millennium era is the postmodern tendency towards fragmentation and pastiche, then drawing meaningful conclusions about the three elements of empirical research as well as the cultural and historical literature review discussed in this dissertation seems somehow inappropriate. But, if the millennium era is the "time of the signs," then distilling out the essences of signification this research has revealed echoes the zeitgeist of this unparalleled time. To this end, I would like to discuss here the five most important issues I have unearthed on the subject of angelic imagery in millennium-era culture: secularization and spirituality, apocalyptic thinking, gender and sexuality, agency and subjectivity, and commodification. In the sections below, I briefly discuss each issue in turn, with representative examples from the research presented in the previous chapters of this work.

Religion, Secularization, and Spirituality

As I discussed in the introductory chapters, issues of religion and secularization have historically maintained a central place in Western culture. From the Holy Roman Empire to the Enlightenment to the Millennium, the tensions between religion and secularity have characterized and defined many cultural products, and by extension, what it means to be a member of a culture at any given epochal time. As the literature review illustrated, angels have had a central place in cultural products during times when religion and spirituality played a central role in defining that period. When secular matters, such as science and industrialization, grew more important, angels retreated to the periphery of cultural expressions. Perhaps, as Swedenborg himself suggested, and Anaya (1999) more recently wrote, (post)modernity has disconnected people from angels. As Berger (1969) among others has proposed, though, even in these times of increased secularization, pockets of spirituality have remained, particularly in forms other than organized religion.

While the millennium era evidences a great deal of secularism, in terms of trends such as church attendance and a focus on technology, the time does not evidence pure secularity. Rather, religion and, more centrally, spirituality have a strong foothold in our culture. In all three of the elements of my empirical research, I found that angels provided a bridge not just between the human and the divine, but between religion and secularization. As belief in angels and consumption of angel cultural products does not require formal church attendance or participation in organized religion, angels provide an opportunity for people to express their spirituality in a way that seems to resonate strongly with their own personal experiences. The "coincidences" portrayed as angelic intervention in the media case studies, for example, provide a sense-making rubric for viewers. As well, collecting angel figurines would allow for people to express their spirituality in a rather innocuous, public way. And, participation on Internet websites devoted to angels creates an environment for people to connect with others with similar views.

This "bridge to spirituality" plays a particularly important role for people who have become disenchanted or disinterested in formal religion, while they still see themselves as fundamentally spiritual people. Alleged reports of sexual abuse in the various faiths, the patriarchal structure of most organized religions, and the general notion of a wrathful God may explain some of the reasons why people do not attend organized religious services in the millennium era. These same people, however, may seek out opportunities to experience and express their own form of personal spirituality. Angels, with their cross-cultural expansiveness and overwhelmingly positive significations as messengers and guardians, provide an optimal resource for people to access as they (re)create their spirituality. Still, angels maintain a strong link with traditional religion, and people may find comfort in this fact. For example, the notion of archangels, discussed in the Bible as well as other scriptures, maintains a connection with "old-time" organized religion. Of course, the separation of the traditional signifiers (haloes, wings, and robes) from many of the angels signified in cultural products makes angels more believable and palatable for some people. As I mentioned in the media research section, people may more easily accept a vague diffusion of light around a "person's" head than fluffy wings and a floating golden halo. These two polarities illustrate the connection angels make between traditional religion and more contemporary expressions of spirituality.

In this vein, one aspect of my inquiry regarding to religion and spirituality particularly surprised me. Initially, I perceived belief in angels as an "easy" form of spirituality, believing that people who did not accept the more challenging elements of a religious life were not as religious as those who did. As I have often commented to people, if you have a choice whether to believe in angels or obey the Ten Commandments, it is a lot easier to believe in angels. I felt people who selected angels as an element of a religion that they wanted in their lives, over believing in concepts such as the wrongness of committing adultery or bearing false witness, were choosing the easy way out. My research has revealed, however, that people want to believe in angels because angels are positive, not (just) easy.

Many people, particularly women, seek out angels as part of their own spiritual path. Just as religious "Sheilas" fuse together elements of various religions to make up their own form of spirituality, people, particularly women, purchase angel collectibles, watch angel television programs and share angel stories over the Internet. Angels symbolize positivity and love in religion, for many people. Despite the Biblical role of angels in Judgment, angels exist only to help people, in many people's minds. While this selection of angels as a spiritual focus may seem narcissistic, it seems at the same time highly positive. Thus, while religious attendance may wane, alternative forms of spiritual expression may continue to exist and grow.

Another issue that surfaced across the three research elements that I did not anticipate at all involved angels as spiritual agents of healing. I noticed this most emphatically in the material culture research, when speaking with the store proprietors. Two owners mentioned the important role angels have in spiritual and emotional healing. One even noted her observation that people in millennium-era culture are "not alone, but lonely." As well, the Internet websites I analyzed included several references to angels healing people, such as when they faced the death of a loved one. Although healing was perhaps not as prominent in the film research, it did surface in subtle ways. People would face spiritual crises and emotional difficulties and the angel(s) who appeared would help these people heal these wounds. Seth helped Maggie conquer her insomnia and her spiritual questioning. Joe helped Parrish heal his floundering communications company. Michael healed Quindlen's lack of spirituality and Dorothy's loneliness, and he also brought the dog back from death. This "healing" metaphor answers at least in part the "why" of the question of the popularity of angels in millennium-era culture.

This emotional/spiritual healing links back to the idea of religion and secularization. As religion has absented itself from many people's lives, they may have felt a sense of loss. Similarly, with millennium era societal issues such as the AIDS epidemic, the lessening of the stigma attached to many forms of abuse, and even environmental damage, people may feel they live in a time characterized by wounding. Positive forms of spirituality, such as angels, provide a psychic bandage for these wounds, which in turn allows for healing. This issue of healing also has a part in the next issue I identified in this study, apocalyptic thinking.

Apocalyptic Thinking

When I embarked on this project in 1998, Y2K had not yet made its much-anticipated appearance, so discourse about the possibility of a literal or metaphorical apocalypse that had surfaced at that time may seem laughable as we look back from our vantagepoint of 2001. Despite the uneventful passing of the millennium (the "fake" one and the "real" one, now), apocalyptic thinking still remains in our culture, at least in the residual effects of the cultural products I examined for this study. Even so, the retail store owners I spoke with seemed to acknowledge tacitly that the popularity of angels may wane, perhaps as a function of distance from millennial thinking, and they have plans to ensure the survival of their businesses in the long term.

As I have mentioned, however, even though most people have accepted the notion that the world will not end in a fiery explosion in the immediate future, death, disease, and decay still serve as the "monsters of the id" about which Kingwell (1996) wrote. These issues that strike fear and loathing in people's minds often give them the impetus to seek out channels of healing for themselves and their world, and angels provide just such a channel. But beyond this notion of healing, angels signify a soothing response to the idea of death, whether in the form of death to oneself or one's loved ones. The media case studies and one website, for example, signified death in a positive way, discouraging fear and encouraging people to accept death as a natural part of life. As Fowkes (1998) suggested, this "defangs" death for people. As well, Zizek (1991) presented the idea of the media character who dies but will not stay dead. The angels in the cultural products can come to represent this possibility for consumers that death is not, after all, final. Similarly, the collectibles and the websites supported the widely held notion that people who die become guardian angels for their loved ones still on earth. Although this notion contradicts scriptural, and other, discussions of angels, the enduring popularity of this idea suggests that people want some reassurance when facing death, whether their own or that of a loved one.

In another way, angels have come to signify taking pleasure in the banality of everyday life. The media angels all want to experience being human, in order to experience pleasures such as eating, drinking, and making love. Some of the websites and collectibles, too, emphasized the need for people to enjoy "the little things in life." This enjoyment of human life, painted as desirable from the angels' point of view, positions itself covertly as the opposite of death. To celebrate not being dead requires celebrating being alive, and this celebration, according to the messages angels signify, means seeing joy in the everyday, from peanut butter to sex. Further, when people focus on the everyday, this draws their attention away from larger socio-cultural issues, which supports the status quo, including issues of power.

Gender and Sexuality

As I discussed in the introduction to this study, I anticipated seeing gender issues surface in my research, and indeed they did. In the film and television research, I found that the films depicted male angels, while the television program focused more on female angels. As I noted, this gender division results in large part from the economic considerations of having a male lead star in a big-budget film, a less risky proposition than a television program. The ways in which the films portrayed two genders, however, moved beyond mere financial considerations. The male angels were signified as enjoying human carnal pleasures, particularly sex, while the female angels were signified as helpers and messengers for humans.

I also noted the prevalence of female images in material culture angels, as the vast majority of the figurines and other collectibles that portrayed adult angels made them female. These female depictions played into the stereotype of a "beautiful" woman, as most of these female angels were signified as white, youthful, slim, attractive, and blonde. The few non-white angels had an "African Princess" look: tall, slim, and regal, with Caucasian features. I was initially disappointed with these images, as I felt casting angels as female, particularly with folk culture collectibles, belittled women. Instead, I have come to believe that the prevalence of these images is both inevitable and empowering.

As most customers are female, or males purchasing gifts for females, logically these people would seek to purchase angels in the image of women. As I have noted earlier, angels provide a bridge to the divine, and people created angel images as human so they could relate to these angels. Logically, women would relate more to female angels. They would perhaps see themselves as spiritual, as guardians, and as objects of beauty. Thus, owning female angel collectibles could provide a source of empowerment for women as they see their own positive traits reflected in these collectibles. It also may empower women to support woman-owned businesses, as most angel retail sites are in the process of consuming these collectibles. As well, the storeowners may identify rather closely with their primary customer base, further cementing this relationship.

Furthermore, I observed a tendency for elite culture to portray angels as male, while popular culture more likely portrays angels as female. For example, in the film genre, considered by some a higher art form than television, the angels were all male. As well, in the more expensive lines of collectibles, called "Objets d'Art" on one Internet site, male angels such as the archangel Michael dressed for spiritual battle were common. In contrast, in the television case study, the female angels are positioned at the center of the program. Likewise, in the lower-priced collectibles, female and child angels were the norm. This pricing demonstrates the possibility of a gender bias in the portrayal of angels. The male angels demonstrate commercially more viability, as male leads with hefty salaries attached to high-budget films and collectibles with higher pricetags. In contrast, the female angels are valued lower, receiving television-scale wages and lower pricetags.

This devaluing goes beyond monetary issues. People may more easily dismiss television and kitsch as unimportant, while films and art objects tend to garner more respect. To be fair, the male-led films in this study have received their share of derision. John Travolta, Nicholas Cage, and Brad Pitt did not receive consistently positive reviews for their work in these films, nor did the plotlines of the film receive consistently positive attention. The occasional derision they receive, however, pales in comparison to the derision I have heard launched at *Touched by an Angel* and the "cutesy-puke" charge leveled at angel collectibles. Not coincidentally, men have launched most of this anecdotal criticism. In doing so, they deride cultural products with mainly female consumers, which by extension means derision directed at women. Forgetting for a moment Bordieu's notion of taste cultures, I am disturbed, though not surprised, at this demonstration of the devaluing of women's culture. From my research at retail sites, I found that women distributors and consumers of these cultural products garner significant personal and spiritual benefits from their interactions with these products. While I did not set out to find this in my research, this demonizing of angelic culture does echo the presence of gender inequalities in millennium era society.

On the other end of the spectrum, though, as Fowkes (1998) suggested, many of the male angels I saw, ranging from art to film, seemed almost feminized. In artistic representations, both historical and contemporary, artists signify male angels as rather androgynous, with slim physiques, flowing hair, and fine features. Although the male film angels have the usual signifiers of typical Hollywood heartthrobs, in the case of Seth in *City of Angels* and Joe in *Meet Joe Black*, their otherworldly status meant emasculation, as they could not experience love or sex. Becoming human "restored" in a sense their masculinity, as they could then consummate their relationships. Similarly, several of the angel collectibles I saw depicted angels in romantic situations, and cupids of course have symbolized love and romance since the Victorian age. In essence, this pairing of quasi-religious issues with sexual/romantic issues echoes Berger's (1977) hypothesis that spirituality and sexuality may indeed one day go hand in hand. This may also enhance the cross-cultural appeal and marketability of angels-themed cultural products as in other cultures, angel signifiers often connect with sexual signifieds. And, it may make possible closer identification between people and angels as people can project themselves more easily onto the image of a sexualized and spiritual being.

The Millennium Era Consuming Subject

The Internet research I conducted analyzed the potential relationship fans have to angel culture in the form of websites. As I discussed in Chapter 6, the Internet itself and angels in particular as a form of fan expression allow a unique opportunity for people to project their own subjectivity through a computer screen onto the symbols of angels it "contains." With the Lacanian notion of the mirror, coupled with the inherent virtuality of the Internet and angels, this projection enables people to construct a subjectivity for themselves that creates an idealized version of self. While the variety of websites does provide a broad number of potential subject-positions, in general the construction of angels as loving, helping entities creates a wholly positive projected construction of self. In fact, it provides an opportunity for people to truly see the divine in themselves. To a lesser extent, television and film create opportunities for viewers to insert themselves within a narrative, thus creating a subject-position for themselves as angels (e.g. guardians, messengers, and healers) or even the object of affection for angels (e.g. fantasizing about Brad Pitt or Nicholas Cage). In a related vein, owning an angel collectible allows people to exert control over the object, thus personally harnessing the power of the angel.

Beyond this notion of the utopian angel subjectivity, one important process of signification in the portrayal of angels involves their role in encouraging human agency. In many of the elements of this research project, angels inspired *but did not cause* human action. As the media research revealed, a crucial element of the angel genre narrative involves this inspiration. For example, Seth's soothing presence brings Maggie peace and a good night's sleep, and the next day she is able to diagnose a mysteriously ill baby. Seth did not "cure" the baby; he gave Maggie the emotional tools so she could perform this "miracle." Similarly, the angel collectibles do not "make" people more spiritual. Rather, they can provide a source of healing, inspiration, and love for people to go about discovering their own spirituality. As well, some of the websites and collectibles, particularly books, encourage people to use their own agency to contact angels, rather than wait for angels to contact them. By enlisting the help of an angel reader or attempting some of the exercises suggested for contacting personal angels, people can feel more in control of the angels they want in their lives. In essence, this emphasis on human agency shows the empowering effect angels can have in people's lives.

Commodification

Then again, maybe it is all about money. Awareness of the political economy of culture reminds me that people make movies and television programs about angels, and sell angel products and angel readings, because they can make money doing so. While people can argue for Wenders' *Wings of Desire* as a purely artistic endeavor, the same argument would certainly not hold for the Warner Brothers production of the remake *City of Angels.* Similarly, even though retailers and angel readers purport they chose their livelihood because of spiritual reasons, they still make money off these transactions. The multiplicity of images and portrayal of these commercial images supports their commercial exchange value. I observed the more commercial an enterprise, the looser the relationships between signifiers and signifieds; producers create significations of angels that sell. Thus, these angels are attractive, loving, and inspirational, not six-winged with a thousand eyes and focused on Judgment. Less commercial enterprises can "afford" to be narrower in their interpretations.

For example, people did not create the organizational, personal and social cause websites on the Internet to make money, and what little money they may make would not come close to paying for the hours of work that go into the creation and maintenance of the websites. Thus, perhaps these forms of angel culture are the "purest" in their lack of clear commercial motivation. With no commercial interest, these sites can "afford" to present a narrower, and less desirable, view of angels. For example, the "Christian" and "Catholic" websites use Biblical information for their primary sources, and they emphasize the positive and negative elements of angels.

Further, the angel culture industry (if I can call it that) provides opportunities for the broad-casting and narrow-casting of angelic imagery. Television and film, of course, represent the broadest market for angel-themed programming, with international possibilities for large audiences and large box-office profits. Again, these broad-casts would seek to provide the loosest, and most attractive, signifier/signified relationships. The collectibles industry, then, provides a middle ground audience. Although the products are mass-marketed, the stores do see a particular target market for these products. Thus, the signifiers represent the desirable characteristics this target market wishes to see. Finally, the websites, by their sheer volume and lower production costs, demonstrate opportunities for narrow-casting of their ideas to a specific type of audience. These websites can construct consistent signifier/signified relationships in whatever way they believe their audience, however narrow, will respond with "hits" or purchases.

Looking past this crossroads in the year 2001 of millennium-era culture, one issue that may affect the continued commercial viability of angel cultural products involves the "reality" trend. Theological musings aside, angels are not real in a tangible sense, and the viewing public maintains its fascination with reality television such as *Survivor* and its spin-offs. This trend, coupled with the knowledge that angel retail sites are less viable than they were even two or three years ago, may indicate that the angel fad is coming to a close. At this point, however, the trend remains strong, with angels continuing to appear in existing and emerging cultural products ranging from mass media to the Internet to the collectibles industry. Continued interest in other areas of spirituality (e.g. paganism, witchcraft) and other extra-terrestrial creatures (e.g. UFOs, aliens) also resonates with a continued interest in angels.

Whether the presence of angels in the cultural products I have studied proves a passing fad or a lasting legacy of the millennium era, I have seen more than enough evidence to support the contention that angels continue to maintain a pervasive presence in Western culture that dates back to Biblical times. Angels provide an optimal site for people to grapple with issues of religion, spirituality, and secularization. Although the positive portrayals of angels water down their apocalyptic potential, the portrayal of angels engenders a focus away from societal ills towards the joyful banality of the everyday. Angels also reflect people's own subjectivity in a way, as they serve as a link between the human and the divine. In this vein, the specific construction of angels in cultural products illustrates producers' desire to put forth signifiers that resonate with consumers in order to ensure commercial viability of the cultural products. This commodification shows a particularly postmodern aspect in the construction of angelic imagery. To return to the words of Rabbi Morris B Margolies with which I opened this dissertation, "Angels are metaphors for the most basic human drive and emotions: love, hate, envy, lust, charity, malice, greed, generosity, sadism, delusion, vision, despair, fear, and hope" (p. 4).

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APPENDIX A:

SEMIOTIC TECHNIQUES

PART I: BERGER

The following questions (adapted slightly to fit the purposes of this project) appear come from Berger's (1982) work *Media Analysis Techniques* (p. 40-41):

Step 1: Isolate and analyze the important signs in the text.
- What are the important signifiers and what do they signify?
- What is the system that gives these signs meaning?
- What codes can be found?
- What ideological and sociological matters are involved?

Step 2: Assess the paradigmatic structure of the text.
- What is the central opposition of the text?
- What paired opposites fit under the various categories?
- Do these oppositions have any psychological or social import?

Step 3: Assess the syntagmic structure of the text.
- How does the sequential arrangement of elements affect meaning?
- Are there formulaic aspects that have shaped the text?

Step 4: Assess how the medium of television affects the text.
- What kinds of shots, camera angles, and editing techniques are used?
- How are lighting, color, music, and sound used to give meaning to signs?

Step 5: Discuss contributions theorists have made that can be applied to the analysis.
- What have semiological theorists written that can be adapted to television?
- What have media theorists written that can be applied to semiological analysis?

APPENDIX A:

SEMIOTIC TECHNIQUES

PART II: CHANDLER

The following questions appear on Chandler's (1999) "do-it-yourself" semiotics website:

Identifying the text

- Wherever possible, include a copy of the text with your analysis of it, noting any significant shortcomings of the copy. Where including a copy is not practicable, offer a clear description which would allow someone to recognize the text easily if they encountered it themselves.
- Briefly describe the medium used, the genre to which the text belongs and the context in which it was found.

Consider your purposes in analysing the text. This will affect which questions seem important to you amongst those offered below.

- Why did you choose this text?
- Your purposes may reflect your values: how does the text relate to your own values?

How does the sign vehicle you are examining relate to the type-token distinction?

- Is it one among many copies (e.g. a poster) or virtually unique (e.g. an actual painting)?
- How does this influence your interpretation?

What are the important signifiers and what do they signify?

- What is the system within which these signs make sense?

Modality

- What reality claims are made by the text?
- Does it allude to being fact or fiction?
- What references are made to an everyday experiential world?
- What modality markers are present?
- How do you make use of such markers to make judgements about the relationship between the text and the world?
- Does the text operate within a realist representational code?
- To whom might it appear realistic?

Paradigmatic analysis

- To which class of paradigms (medium; genre; theme) does the whole text belong?
- How might a change of medium affect the meanings generated?
- What might the text have been like if it had formed part of a different genre?
- What paradigm sets do each of the signifiers used belong to? For example, in photographic, televisual and filmic media, one paradigm might be shot size.
- Why do you think each signifier was chosen from the possible alternatives within the same paradigm set? What values does the choice of each particular signifier connote?
- What signifiers from the same paradigm set are noticeably absent?
- What contrasted pairs seem to be involved (e.g. nature/culture)?
- Which of those in each pairing seems to be the 'marked' category?
- Is there a central opposition in the text?
- Apply the commutation test in order to identify distinctive signifiers and to define their significance. This involves an imagined substitution of one signifier for another of your own, and assessing the effect.

What is the syntagmatic structure of the text?

- Identify and describe syntagmatic structures in the text which take forms such
- as narrative, argument or montage.
- How does one signifier relate to the others used (do some carry more weight
- than others)?
- How does the sequential or spatial arrangement of the elements influence
- meaning?
- Are there formulaic features that have shaped the text?
- If you are comparing several texts within a genre look for a shared syntagm.
- How far does identifying the paradigms and syntagms help you to understand the text?

Metaphors and metonyms

- What metaphors and metonyms are involved?
- How are they used to influence the preferred reading?

Intertextuality

- Does it allude to other genres?
- Does it allude to or compare with other texts within the genre?
- How does it compare with treatments of similar themes within other genres?
- Does one code within the text (such as a linguistic caption to an advertisement or news photograph) serve to 'anchor' another (such as an image)? If so, how?

What semiotic codes are used?

- Do the codes have double, single or no articulation?
- Are the codes analogue or digital?
- Which conventions of its genre are most obvious in the text?
- Which codes are specific to the medium?
- Which codes are shared with other media?
- How do the codes involved relate to each other (e.g. words and images)?
- Are the codes broadcast or narrowcast?
- Which codes are notable by their absence?
- What relationships does the text seek to establish with its readers?
- How direct is the mode of address and what is the significance of this?
- How else would you describe the mode of address?
- What cultural assumptions are called upon?
- To whom would these codes be most familiar?
- What seems to be the preferred reading?
- How far does this reflect or depart from dominant cultural values?
- How 'open' to interpretation does the sign seem to be?

Social semiotics

- What does a purely structural analysis of the text downplay or ignore?
- Who created the sign? Try to consider all of those involved in the process.
- Whose realities does it represent?
- For whom was it intended? Look carefully at the clues and try to be as detailed as you can.
- How do people differ in their interpretation of the sign? Clearly this needs direct investigation.
- On what do their interpretations seem to depend?
- Illustrate, where possible, dominant, negotiated and oppositional readings.
- How might a change of context influence interpretation?

Benefits of semiotic analysis

- What other contributions have semioticians made that can be applied productively to the text?
- What insights has a semiotic analysis of this text offered?
- What other strategies might you need to employ to balance any shortcomings of your analysis?

APPENDIX B:

Television Programs that have featured "Otherwordly" characters, organized by categories

Science Fiction and Aliens
- Doctor Kildare
- Star Trek
- Star Trek Next Generation
- Star Trek Deep Space Nine
- X Files
- Outer Limits
- Lost in Space
- My Favorite Martian
- Mork and Mindy
- Alien Nation
- Millennium
- Jetsons
- Futurama
- Flying Discman from Mars
- Babylon 5
- Battlestar Gallactica
- ALF
- Small Wonder
- Stargate SG1
- Space Ghost cartoon
- Space: Above and Beyond
- Space 1999
- Voyager
- VR5
- American Gothic (Sci Fi)
- Earth 2
- Earth: The Final Conflict
- Poltergeist the Legacy
- Sliders

Vampires, Witches, Ghosts
- Buffy the Vampire Slayer
- Angel
- Sabrina the Teenage Witch
- My Mother the Car
- Bewitched
- Addams family
- Ghost and Mrs. Muir
- Angel, Buffy spinoff
- Munsters
- Elvira
- Dracula: The Series
- Dark Shadows.
- Forever Knight
- Ghostbusters
- Transformers
- Third Rock from the sun

Superheroes
- Superman Hercules
- Xena
- Mighty Morphin Power Rangers
- Lois and clark
- Batman
- Greatest American Hero
- Green Hornet
- Incredible Hulk
- Wonder Woman
- Planet of the Apes
- Fireball XL5

Fantasy
- Fantasy Island
- Twilight Zone
- Quantum Leap
- Early Edition

Miscellaneous
- Highlander
- I Dream of Jeannie
- The Crow

Angels/Religion
- Teen Angel
- Highway to Heaven
- Ballykissangel
- Father Ted

Appendix C – Detailed synopsis of *Touched by an Angel*

Episode A

Two men, Del and Nick, are discussing finances as they exit a factory and Del gets into a car and drives away. Del has apparently done some "creative financing" for the factory and has decided to quit his position there to avoid facing the problems created by this illegal tax financing. The factory wall shows a worn logo for Stratton Textiles, along with the "Made in the USA" label.

Monica and Tess discuss Nick Stratton as Monica's newest case, focusing in particular on Nick's anger as resulting from his role as a soldier in Viet Nam. Tess calls him "a good man with a bad attitude," because of his experience in the war that blurred the boundaries of right and wrong.

Monica is talking to Nick about filling the position of accountant, telling him that "finding the truth is one of my specialties." He offers her the job, and she begins work, looking at the employee list and noticing that the books have been updated recently. He tells her that he decided to catch up in case the IRS wanted to examine the books. A young woman (Agnyac Nguyen (sp?)) approaches Nick, and he rudely tells her to use the employees' entrance. Then, he takes the two of them on a tour of the factory. Nick tells Agnyac about the rules, including no talking on the floor and only talking in English while on breaks. Agnyac informs Monica that Nick will pay for citizenship classes if they work all day and make quota. He yells at an employee, and when she replies in a non-English language, he fires her. Nick teaches Agnyac to operate a steam press, though it seems to be malfunctioning.

Tess walks with Monica around the factory and she tells Monica about the experiences and dreams of the factory workers, all of whom are immigrants. Monica asks Tess why the workers put up with Nick, and Tess thinks it is their last chance for work and a life in the US. Monica asks why he helps the people he hates, and Tess reminds her of the shades of gray between right and wrong that Nick experienced during the war.

Monica worries about the workers surviving in the factory long enough to become citizens, and Tess tells Monica that the citizenship class has a great teacher. The next scene shows Tess in front of a classroom, addressing the students as "babies." Agnyac enters and gets permission from Tess for her father to sit in on the class. One citizenship student, Ling, tells Tess that another worker did not make her quota and that she will not be able to come to class. Tess tells her that the class is open to everyone. She then goes on to discuss the Declaration of Independence, subtly likening the oppression by the English with the oppression the workers experience with Nick. Ling expresses her fears about being able to pass the test, and Tess tells them she will help them memorize the necessary information through music. As an example, she sings a song that lists the names of the presidents.

Nick is berating his employees, telling them if Agnyac could meet her quota the first day then the rest of them should be able to produce more, too. Agnyac burns her arm on the press, and Nick has a flashback of Vietnam. Monica helps her though there are no supplies in the factory's first aid kit and tells her she needs to take a break, though she thinks she will not be able to make quota. Nick fires her for her inability to run the machine.

Monica exits the factory and approaches Nick, who is sitting in his truck, playing his guitar and drinking from a bottle that turns out to be root beer. Monica insists that Nick shouldn't have fired Agnyac as she might have died, and she reminds him that Agnyac is Vietnamese and is not the enemy. He asks if she's okay, but Monica says she should go to the doctor, which worker's compensation will pay for. He tells her he is not paid up,

Monica picks up his guitar, and when she tells him she's never played, he teaches her a chord. He tells her about taking his guitar to Vietnam, and she asks him more about what he did there. After telling her she shouldn't have asked, he tells her about working alongside people who didn't speak English and how he used music to bridge the language gap. She asks him about why he is angry, and he tells her that he is losing his business, and she suggests that maybe he is losing his business because he is angry. She sees his friendship bracelet and asks why he wears it. He tells her about picking up a Vietnamese man who was injured, although the soldiers didn't know if he was the enemy or not. The man shows Nick a tattoo of the peace sign on his shoulder, so Nick untied his hands and he gave Nick the friendship bracelet. Immediately after, a bomb went off and the man got away. When a tent was fired upon a few days later, Nick was court martialed for aiding the enemy and he was imprisoned for the remainder of the war and disowned by all his family except his Uncle Joe. Joe gave him a job in the factory and later willed the factory to Nick. Nick tells her the bracelet reminds him never to trust sweet, innocent faces again.

Andrew drives up (in a convertible, despite the apparent cold weather that has everyone wearing heavy coats and gloves, and introduces himself as an IRS agent and asks to see Nick. Nick comments about the only things in life being certain are death and taxes. Andrew, Monica, and Nick go upstairs to go over the bills while Agnyac is downstairs in the nearly empty factory, sewing. Tess approaches Agnyac and Agnyac says she will not be able to come to class for a while. Tess tells her she will give her lessons in private.

The next morning, Nick wakes up in his office with Andrew and Monica still working and Agnyac down in the factory still working. Tess is beside Agnyac sewing, helping the employees make their quotas. The workers sew all day, and though Agnyac has fallen asleep after working all night Ling helps her make her quota. Monica tells Nick that he has only paid taxes on half of the employees over the past three years. Nick wants Monica to lie to Andrew, but she refuses though she knows that keeping the business is important. Monica tells Nick that the IRS will work with him on a payment plan. Agnyac's father comes to pick her up, and Nick spots a peace sign on her father's arm, just like the young Vietnamese man that escaped years ago. He tells Monica that he wants to kill him.

Monica tries to talk with Nick about his violent feelings towards Agnyac, but he seems determined to get revenge. At class, Tess expresses her pleasure at seeing all the employees, as they've all made their quota by working together. Tess comments that "standing up and standing together" is an important part of being American. Agnyac's father tells the class that an American soldier helped him survive. Tess then begins to discuss the Boston Tea Party with the class, emphasizing the idea that the Americans were protesting English oppression through their actions.

Andrew tells Nick that he owes over fifty seven thousand dollars, and despite Andrew and Monica's ideas for helping him, he ignores them and resigns to the fact that the factory will be given over to the government. Monica asks him what he is not telling her, and he refuses to tell her. He goes into the factory and berates Agnyac, who says the garment is perfect and that the employees have rights that he is infringing upon. He tells her that he earned the rights for Americans, not for her. Agnyac insists that he make the working conditions better, and all the workers stand behind her. Nick fires all of them, and when Monica protests, he orders her to get out, saying that he doesn't need anybody..

Later that night, Nick spray paints "Die American" on the factory wall and says "I'll show them justice." He sets up a bomb to go off, and as he starts to leave the factory, a rickety shelf falls on him and he is pinned there, crying. Andrew approaches the factory.

Agnyac tells Tess after class that "something bad happened," and Tess puts her arm around her maternally and they talk about it. Tess advises her to talk to Nick that night, before it is too late..

As the timer runs out, Andrew enters the factory. Nick, still pinned under the shelving, says "God help me. Help me please." The bomb goes off, and Nick has flashes of his life, including his time in Vietnam and the recent days in the factory. Suddenly, Nick sees the clock and it still has two seconds left. He is confused, and Monica appears with light around her, and Nick tells her to get out, as she will get killed. She tells him about life flashing before your eyes just before you die, and she tells him that she is an angel sent to earth to help people like him. She tells him that she, like God, appears in moments such as this, in an instant between life and death. He tells her to tell God to go away as being a good person ruined his life. Monica tells him that God saw what he did that day, telling him that honoring men honors God. She tells him that his anger and hatred has drowned out the voice of God in his life, and that Uncle Joe and his faith in Nick was a symbol of God in Nick's life. Nick repents regretfully that he ruined his chance. Monica tells him that God loves him and she tearfully offers him hope and forgiveness if he stands on the side of God's love. He tells her that he doesn't deserve it, and she tells him that no one does, which "makes it such a miracle."

Andrew enters, sees Monica and hears Nick ask God for forgiveness and he smiles at Monica and then leaves. Monica disappears, and the timer still has thirty seconds left. Agnyac comes into the factory with her father, who disarms the bomb. Agnyac goes to get help and sees the "Die American" sign. He calls her by name, surprising her, and tells her that he knew her father. The father tells how he ran far away after he escaped with Nick's help and told everyone how Nick saved him. Nick realizes that he didn't set the bomb, and the father tells him he never got to thank him, but that he named his daughter the Vietnamese word for "Music" after him. Nick asks Agnyac for forgiveness, and Agnyac wants Nick to work with her to make the factory safe. Father tells him in Vietnamese that "no good deed goes unrewarded" and gives the peace sign.

The citizenship students take their citizenship oath and Tess congratulates her "babies" with Nick and the angels looking on. Tess tells Monica and Andrew that she is proud of all her babies, citizens of America and citizens of heaven. Monica, Tess, and Andrew leave the classroom and walk past a poster for a Woodstock-like music and peace rally. After they walk by, a dove in the poster glows as the credits and producer Martha Williamson's name flash on the screen.

Episode B

Tess and Monica are sitting atop a mountain, with glowing light surrounding them, discussing the sport of sking. Two men ski past and goad each other into skiing onto a closed area. Tess informs Monica that they are her assignment.

At the bottom of the hill, the US World Cup Qualifying runs are taking place, and the ski hill is identified as Park City, Utah. The two men skiing earlier are participating, and one brother (Jett) skis faster than another brother (Will). Tess informs Monica that everyone, including the boys' father, thinks of Jett as the fast brother and Will as the slow brother. Their coach and their father appear and praise Jett and give Will suggestions for improvement. Jett talks about Will's good skiing earlier that morning. Their father gets a call on his cell phone about a sponsor, and the coach tells them to get their equipment checked out for the next day.

A group of reporters approaches, and Will leaves Jett to talk to his "fan club," and the boys make plans to have another run before lunch. Tess tells Monica that Will is her assignment because he doesn't want to win, but "he has never had so much to lose before." Just then, Andrew appears behind Will.

Jet is talking to reporters, encouraging viewers to come out and watch the trials. Monica approaches him as a reporter and wants to write a story about best friends competing. Jett is encouraging about Will's ability to make the team. The two enter the lodge and find Howard, Will's dad, and he tells them about a sponsor he has found for Jett. Jett wants Will to be in the advertisements, though the sponsor only wants Jett. Howard tells Will if he wins tomorrow he will have a chance at being sponsored, too.

Will are outside the lodge alone and Monica approaches Will to ask him questions about his life growing up. He tells her that his family adopted Jett when Jett was ten, and that Howard taught them both to ski. He goes on to say that they wouldn't be there if it weren't for Howard, that he is a great guy. She comments that he has beaten everyone but Jett and this seems strange. He tells her that Jett is a better skiier and deserves to win. She asks him if he minds losing to Jett, and he says, "I guess it depends on what you lose" while looking in the lodge at Jett. He tells her that he may surprise everyone tomorrow.

The next day, the Giant Slalom event begins, and Jett and Will are at the top, and Jett comments that they could be there in 2002 "me getting gold and you getting silver." Will says maybe he will get gold, and Jett says "it's kind of like tradition" for him to win, though if Will wins, it won't hurt his feelings. He says he'd hate to lose this while pointing to a red bandanna on his head. Will explains to Monica that the bandanna used to be his, the last time he ever beat Jett and anything. Jett takes off on his run and has the best time as well as a personal best time. Everyone cheers for hymn, including three businessmen who will be his sponsors. Will takes off on his run, and Jett tells him that there's a problem on the run and tells him to take it easy. Will says "no guts, no glory" and hits a flag and comes in three seconds after Jett and doesn't make the first team. His father tries to encourage him, but Will rebuffs his encouragement. Will tells Monica that he shouldn't have tried to win, or else he would have made the team.

That night, Monica sees him in front of the fireplace and she tells him that she knows he has been losing on purpose to Jett, until the previous day's race when he really wanted to win. He confides in her that he can't stand to see Jett lose. He tells her of a childhood bet about the bandanna, when the boys bet about who could smoke the most cigarettes to win the bandanna. When Jett's dad nearly caught them, they ran to Will's house and stayed the night there, but Jett's house burned down and killed Jett's parents. Will then gave Jett the bandanna, and Will decided he never wanted Jett to lose anything again. Jett comes in and overhears the conversation, and tells Will that this is an excuse and Will is just not good enough. They bet about who is the faster skiier, and the two prepare for a race with Jett in the lead most of the time. Will overtakes Jett when his bandanna blows off. As Jett looks back at the bandanna, he skis off a cliff and Will stops, as Andrew boards the chairlift.

A helicopter takes Jett to the hospital, and the team meets in the hospital, watching a television report about Jett that says he was taking an expert run called "the widow maker." The coach tells him to skip practice that day, but to come the next day as he is now a member of the world cup team. Howard asks Will what happened, and Will tells him they were racing. Howard says he has never beaten Jett at anything, why would he start now. Tess comes out as a nurse/doctor and tells them they can see Jett, though there is some bad news.

They go in to talk to Jett, who is in traction and tells them his drugs are good, that he can't feel his legs and probably won't be able to ski "for a couple weeks." He asks about his bandanna, and Will tells him that he injured his spinal cord and probably won't be able to walk. Jett cries.

Will goes to the ski hill and the coach tells him he needs to get Jett out of his mind and focus on the course. Will takes off on a run with Jett's voice repeating "you're not good enough" in his mind. Will goes to the spot where Jett went off the cliff and found the bandanna. Monica shows up next to Will, and he blames her for inciting the accident. Andrew appears and tells Monica it isn't her fault, that Jett has always been a risk taker.

Jett is talking to Tess the nurse, and he is depressed about his condition. Will comes to visit and brings the bandanna. Jett tells Will that he remembers their fight, and he says he never imagined he'd be in that situation. Jett tells him that he needs a friend and he needs Will's help to kill himself. Tess, Monica, and Andrew appear in the hospital room surrounded by glowing light and dressed in white.

Will tells him that he won't help Jett kill himself, and Jett pleads with him. Jett tells him he will miss Will if he's gone, but that he will hate him if he's still here. Will leaves, unable to help Jett. As he leaves the hospital, he sees the nurse leave the station and steals a bunch of the medicines and goes into an empty hospital room. Monica appears to him and tells him his notion about friendship is misguided. She tells him that she is an angel and a glowing light appears around her. He doesn't believer her at first and tells her that she should tell God to heal Jett. She tells him that God will listen to their prayers, and that God knows the difference between what Jett wants and what Jett needs. He gives her the medicine, and she tells him that he has been hiding behind Jett his whole life. She tells him that Jett and his father love him and believe he is the person he has appeared to be. Monica asks him if he really has lost on purpose, and he says that it started out that way but he isn't sure if he always has. She tells him he will never know. She tells him that he has given up so much to protect Jett, and all he needed was Will's love and support. Will says he's screwed everything up, and Monica tells him that's usually when you're ready to listen to an angel. She tells him not to hold back, to live his life in truth and he will know what real winning is, not about being better or faster but loving. God loves him and He gets pleasure in watching Will go down the mountain. The greatest gift God has given him is his friendship with Jett. She pleads with him to save his friendship and allow God to save his friend.

Howard approaches Will in the hospital waiting room and reminds him he has to race in two hours. Will apologizes and tells Howard that he hasn't been honest and he let Jett win, and he never minded until he thought he was losing Howard. Howard tells him that he could never lose him and he loves him, no matter what and that he is proud of him.

Will goes into Jett's room and tells him that Monica is an angel who has brought the message that God doesn't want Jett to die. Jett is angry and tells him that he doesn't need Will, God, or any angels. He admits that he did let Jett win at first, but that he eventually didn't know whether he would have won or not. He tells Jett that he will always love him. Andrew appears to Jett, surrounded by a glowing aura, and tells him that he has demonstrated a "death wish" with his reckless skiing, driving, and other activities. Andrew tells Jett that he is the angel of death, and he tells him to take him, but Andrew reminds him that ever since his parents died he has tried to get himself killed. Jett asks him if the cigarettes were the reason his parents died, and Andrew says that doesn't matter, but his friendship with Will does matter. Jett asks Andrew if he knows Monica and she brings Will the red bandanna, as he is about to race. She tells him that Jett will be watching on TV and expects him to win. After the run, Will hugs his dad and points to the red bandanna on television as a signal to Jett, who is watching from his hospital bed.

Monica, Tess, and Andrew are walking around the hospital and Tess is complaining that her feet are cold. Monica says Will is planning to teach her to ski, and Andrew suggests they can learn to luge in the meantime. Tess says she likes the sound of cocoa more than the sound of the luge as they walk down a hallway towards a light and dissolve.

Episode C

A man and his daughter exit a restaurant on a winter's day, and the man has apparently lost his valet ticket. They point to a red Cadillac as their car, and he bribes the valet to bring them the car, which he does. Monica and Tess exit the restaurant and see the car driving away as Tess notes tearfully that it was her car and Monica's assignment. The car drives down the road and the father and daughter pull off to the side of the road where they load some hidden luggage into the trunk. The father notes that "a lot of suckers buy convertibles." The car has Nevada plates, and the father and daughter decide to go to Utah, so they change license plates. The daughter suggests Salt Lake City, where the next winter Olympics will be held, as she hasn't skated in two weeks, and the father agrees to go to a skating rink. They drive off and Tess and Monica pick up the license plate they left at the side of the road. Tess explains the assignment, saying that Bart is a con artist who learned his trade from his own father and is now teaching the trade to his daughter, Haley. Monica likens God to a con artist, though Tess argues that faith is born of free will.

The red Cadillac drives up to a skating arena and the Ewings enter and purchase entrance fees from Monica, who works at the till. Bart cons Monica into more change than he deserved. A man (the rink owner) brings Monica some expensive skates to put in a display case at the cash register area. Bart watches while Haley skates, and Andrew is the rink DJ who announces an upcoming skating event. Bart watches the rink owner with a cash envelope, and he watches his daughter skate. A very advanced skater goes by, and Bart talks to the owner, Carl, and finds out the advanced skater is Alex, Carl's daughter. Bart pretends to have found some money on the floor and asks if it is Carl's and then offers to donate the money to a children's benefit. Carl notes that it's hard to find an honest man. Andrew introduces himself to Haley out on the ice, and then introduces her to Alex, who is training for the Olympics. Alex offers to give Haley some pointers. and they skate off together. Afterward, Carl says to Alex that the Ewings are nice people. Tess looks into her car, pouting, and Monica notes how they essentially live out of their car, which is a terrible way to raise a child. Inside the motel room, Haley plays with a skater inside a snowglobe and talks about her skating potential and Bart reminds her that her future is in the con business. He says to himself that there will be a big score with the upcoming benefit, and Monica (with glowing light behind her) looks on, disappointed.

Alex skates around the rink with Haley and Andrew watching. She tells him that she wants to be a skater, but she also wants to make her dad happy. Andrew tells her to listen to her conscience as "it's usually a lot more reliable" and it always tells you the truth. When Alex finishes her routine, she skates over to talk to Haley and suggests that Haley needs new skates. Bart is looking at the expensive skates, and Monica tells him that "there's more to life than money." Bart invites Carl out for a beer, but Carl turns him down as he plans to close early and get his deposits ready. Back in the hotel room, Haley wonders what happened to the guy in Colorado that gave them the Cadillac, and Bart tells her that he most likely got fired for such a stupid move. Bart tells her that they are running out of money, and Haley wants to stay long enough to try out for the team. Bart says he will think about it. The next scene shows a montage of scenes with Alex helping Haley learn, as well as a scene of Haley looking at the expensive skates. As the Ewings return to their motel room, Haley begs her father to stay for good so she can skate and settle down and "get a life." Bart cons Carl into letting Haley skate at the rink after hours, telling him a story about Haley's grandmother being sick. Carl gladly agrees, as he stays late to do the deposits. Monica is about to leave for the evening when the Ewings arrive, and she realizes that Bart plans to steal the deposit money. Bart leaves, saying he wants to check out a real estate deal, and Haley and Alex skate together. Bart drives to the motel and quickly packs their belongings, accidentally knocking the skater snowglobe under the bed. He returns to the arena and cuts the lights out. Carl goes to check things out, with the girls still alone on the rink. Bart replaces the full cash envelope with an identical, empty one, and he steals the skates as well with a glowing Monica looking on.

Carl gets the lights back on, and Bart knocks at the door, telling Haley it is time to go. Bart professes his ignorance at electrical matters and thanks Carl and Alex again for all their help. They drive away and Haley sees their belongings in the back seat, she gets very angry when she finds out he has stolen the money and the skates. She realizes her snowglobe is missing and as it was her mother's, she refuses to leave town without it. Carl goes back to his office and realizes the money and skates have been stolen. The Ewings return to the motel and Haley finds the snowglobe, but when she leaves the motel room she finds the police with Bart. Haley tells the police she took the money and the skates, and he police arrest her. She tells him that it will be okay, that it will all work out. Monica and Tess look on, glowing, and Monica is disappointed that Bart allows his daughter to be arrested. Bart approaches Carl, telling him that Haley stole the money and skates because her grandmother is ill. Carl refuses to drop the charges, saying that maybe this will help Haley. Tess, the jail warden, allows Bart in to see Haley in jail. She gets mad at him because he broke her promise to stay in Salt Lake City, and he tells her that he has not been able to get her out of jail. Tess makes Bart leave, telling them that the judge at the hearing the next day is very strict. Haley gets even angrier at Bart, telling him she hates him for ruining her life, and she throws the snowglobe at the wall, shattering it. Bart picks up the pieces.

Back in the motel room, Bart tries to glue the snowglobe back together and Monica appears, offering to talk to him. She tells him that she knows he is a con man, and that she knows he has hurt so many people with his cons. She tells him she is an angel, and a glowing light appears around her. Bart thinks she is conning him, but she tells him that God exists and He sent her to tell him that HE loves Bart, though He hates many of the things that Bart has done. She tells him that he is hurting his daughter, even though Bart doesn't physically hurt Haley as his father hurt him. She tearfully tells him that he has hurt his daughter by teaching her the con game and to ignore her conscience. She reminds him that a conscience is God's gift to humans. Monica appears to repair the snowglobe and urges him to change his life and start respecting people and embracing God's love. Bart begins to cry and asks "What kind of man have I been?" Monica tells him that God cares more about the kind of man he will become. At the hearing, Bart appears and he confesses to the theft. He also gives the snowglobe to Haley, who looks at it disbelieving. Bart admits that he has been a bad father, and in the courtroom behind him, Tess lifts her eyes and says "Praise your name, Father." He tells Haley that his parents were bad to him, and he tried to be better to her but has realized he has failed. Haley cries and hugs her father, and Bart tells her to take advantage of the situation. The judge remands Haley to the court's custody. Tess hugs her and Haley says she will miss him and will be all alone. Tess tells her that she won't be alone. Haley is at the rink, talking to Andrew, and Monica takes her over to talk to Alex just before the pageant. Alex gives Haley the expensive skates to welcome Haley to the family, as her parents have arranged to be Haley's foster parents. Alex begins her routine to the song "When I See you Smile," and the characters look on and cheer as they watch the program. Haley asks Monica if things will be okay, and Monica assures her that they will be. Andrew drives up in the Cadillac and Tess takes the wheel as they angels drive off, with a dove fluttering above the car. Just after the show, a promotional message notes that the songs featured in the episode are available on the "Touched by an Angel" album available in stores.

Episode D

In the "teaser" sequence, a white dove flutters across a city skyline, presumably New York. Monica and Andrew stand outside a large building, a television network, watching violent images on a number of televisions outside the building. Andrew comments how television has changed how families relate to one another, and Tess approaches the two and tells them television can harm them. Tess tells Monica that her assignment is the president of the network, and that Monica is one of a series of angels sent to the President for a brief moment. A man (T.K. McKenna) exits a limousine and enters the building. Tess tells Monica that McKenna only cares about the network being #1, though he used to care about "being the best." Although Monica is unsure that she can make a difference in one minute, Andrew reminds her that a minute can change lives dramatically.

Monica enters the "executive wing" of the network, with busy people walking through the halls discussing the network's programming. A woman (McKenna's assistant) talks with a man who has bags full of letters complaining about the network's recent program of explosions. McKenna is on the phone in his office, talking about the success of the explosions program. After hanging up the phone, McKenna toys with an old manual typewriter, with a wistful look on his face. Monica enters the room and McKenna says he is not surprised to see her as approximately every six months he has a strange visitor that brings messages such as "God loves you" or "Follow your dreams." McKenna gloats the success of the explosions program, and Monica tells him he could do better, not in terms of ratings, just "better." McKenna tells her to pitch him a story about something she knows, and she suggests a program on angels that God sends to earth to help people in their hour of need. McKenna suggests "a half hour of need," as that's all the time they have. He asks her more about a program about angels, and a series of vignettes illustrates. One scene depicts Tess promoting Monica from search and rescue to caseworker, and other scenes show situations where Monica , Andrew, and Tess work together on various cases. The scene fades back to McKenna and Monica, and McKenna's assistant Irene enters. McKenna challenges Irene as she didn't think the explosions program should have included a situation with a school bus. When introduced to Monica, Irene understands that Monica is one of the mysterious strangers that appears to McKenna. Monica explains that angels appear in a variety of guises, and a series of vignettes show Monica, Andrew, and Tess as angels masquerading as characters such as an Army officer, television producer, chef and skydivers. The scene fades back to McKenna, saying "no wings?" When Monica replies "no wings," he thanks her and dismisses her, though Irene says she thinks the idea is great. A woman enters McKenna's office to discuss trends in American society, and she tells him (among other trends) that 76% of Americans believe in angels. Monica exits the network and gets scolded by Tess for pitching her idea rather than focusing on her assignment. McKenna runs after Monica and asks her to meet some people, so she returns to the network to discuss the idea of an angel television program with a group of people. The group hesitates at the idea of angels, suggesting that perhaps devils are "edgier" than angels. Monica balks at this idea, saying that angels can be very edgy. A series of vignettes depict the angels in a series of terrifying situations such as explosions, shootings, and accidents. The group then asks her what heaven looks like, and Monica tells them of the beauty of heaven. A woman suggests they will need a lot of special effects, and two men propose the ideas of heaven as a junkyard or a bowling alley. She tells them they are missing the point, and proceeds to tell them about the angel of death. A series of vignettes show the activities of Andrew, the angel of death, as he takes people "home" after they die or reaches out to them with a warning at a crisis point in their lives. The group proposes ideas for the angel of death, including a maniacal laugh as he kills people, and Monica leaves the meeting in disgust. She goes to see McKenna, and as he is gone, she talks with Irene. Irene tells her that McKenna is no longer in touch with the realities of daily living as his wealth helps to overcome challenging situations. Irene tells Monica that her car broke down, and compares the challenges this provides her that McKenna would not have to deal with at all. She goes on to tell Monica about McKenna's earlier idealism when he was a scriptwriter, before he became an executive. Monica sits at a table pensively, waiting for McKenna and thinking of ideas for the angel show. Tess scolds her again, and she goes into McKenna's office. She finds him sitting in the dark, and he tells her that someone blew up a city bus, copycatting the situation depicted on the network's explosion show.

The next morning, McKenna tells Monica that he is being blamed, though he denies responsibility. He can't find Irene, and she tells him about Irene's car trouble. He then asks her if she knew 76% of people believe in angels, and she tells him the percentage is actually higher, though some people are too embarrassed to admit it. He tells her that a show about angels would make them "the network that cares." A series of vignettes show Monica and Andrew at work on various cases, instructing people on embracing God and good in their lives just prior to and during their revelations of their roles of angels. McKenna tells her that angels aren't gritty enough, and Monica tells him about Tess as a series of vignettes show Tess strongarming people (including Monica and Andrew) and yelling at them about their faults and character flaws. McKenna still hesitates at the idea, and when he and Monica return to his office, Andrew is waiting there, glowing and apparently invisible to McKenna. Monica realizes that Andrew is bringing a message about someone's death, and Monica then tells McKenna that Irene died in the bus explosion.

McKenna talks sadly with Monica about Irene's death when his assistants come in his office and mention how Irene's death causes a PR problem. McKenna orders them out. Andrew talks with Monica, telling her that he was with Irene when she died, and that Irene expressed regret about McKenna and wanted him to have something. McKenna tells Monica that Irene believed in God and angels, and he asks Monica if she thinks angels were with Irene when she died. Monica tells him that there were angels with Irene at birth and death. He asks Monica about the roles of angels, and a series of vignettes show guest stars portraying angel characters such as an "internal affairs" angel, a manners coach for Tess, a "teen angel," and a disabled angel. McKenna tells Monica that he still doesn't believe in angels, and she asks if he believes in God. He tells her that belief in

God requires faith, which requires risk, and he doesn't take risks. She likens faith to a leap across a chasm, and she begins to tell him about the revelation. A series of vignettes show angels revealing themselves to their cases, and the revelation shows the angels with golden light bathing them from behind as they bring people the word of God to tell them that God loves them. During the revelation, Monica often tears up as she speaks emotionally. McKenna tells her the revelation is "over the top," and Monica retorts that God is " over the top." She reveals herself as an angel sent from God and brings God's message to McKenna: Take the risk, meaning follow his earlier dream of being a scriptwriter of better programming. He tells her he threw the script away a long time ago, and Monica tells him that Irene saved a copy of the script. He finds a copy of "Home of the Brave" in the file cabinet and Monica urges him to take his idea to the board of directors. Then, Monica disappears. McKenna goes to the board and proposes that they cancel the explosions show in favor of more family-oriented programming. He says that if they do the right thing, the ratings will follow, and he reads his script to them with the warning that he will quit if they don't follow his ideas. The angels walk out of the office and Andrew tells Monica he liked her idea of the angel show. She tells him "Nah, it'd never work" as the three dissolve away.

APPENDIX D:
ETHICS APPROVAL FORM
(TO BE INSERTED)

University of Alberta
Department of Sociology
Faculty of Arts
Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2H4

To: Kathryn Pallister
Date: February 29, 2000

From: Herbert C. Northcott, PhD
Statutory Member from the Department of Sociology,
Faculty of Arts Research Ethics Board

RE: Ethics Review of Your Proposed Project Titled: Interviews with owners and/or managers of two stores which sell angel-related products

I am pleased to report that your proposed research is acceptable on ethical grounds.

Signed:

Herbert C. Northcott, PhD

APPENDIX E:
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR ANGEL RETAIL STORE OWNERS/MANAGERS

1. When did the store open?

2. Is the store independent or is it affiliated with any other store or retail chain?

3. What motivated the opening of the store? (e.g. retail trends, research)

4. What planning and/or research went in to opening the store?

5. Who are your typical customers? (e.g. gender, age, socio-economic status, religion)

6. Have these customers changed since your store opened?

7. Do you do any market research to determine the demographics of your current or potential customers?

8. What sort of advertising or publicity do you do?

9. Why do you think customers (a) enter the store for the first time, and (b) continue to shop at your store?

10. Do you have a sense of whether customers purchase items more themselves, or for gifts for someone else?

11. How do you select merchandise for your store?

12. Has your stock changed in the time your store has been opened?

13. Where do you get your merchandise? (e.g. manufacture it, purchase through US or Canadian distributors, trade shows)

14. Do you think the popularity of angels and angel collectibles will change in the future? If so, how?